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THE "REVERENCE FOR LIFE" PHILOSOPHY OF ALBERT SCHWEITZER:  
AN EXISTENTIAL MODEL IN AN ETHICALLY-ORIENTED  
EDUCATION

by



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A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The 'Reverence for Life' Philosophy of Albert Schweitzer: An Existential Model in an Ethically-Oriented Education," submitted by Charles Kenneth Westerlund, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.



## ABSTRACT

This thesis entitled "The 'Reverence for Life' Philosophy of Albert Schweitzer: An Existential Model in an Ethically-Oriented Education" examines Albert Schweitzer's philosophy of "reverence for life," and as a consequence of his views of civilization establishes a single definition of the purpose of education, namely the training of a moral citizenry, for which Albert Schweitzer might serve as an existential ethical model.

The introductory chapter relates the need for this study, the purpose of the study, a definition of "reverence for life" and the organization of the study.

In the second chapter, a brief biographical account of the life of Albert Schweitzer is given.

Those factors which may have played a role in the emergence of Schweitzer's philosophy of "reverence for life" are considered in the third chapter. Consideration is given to the environment into which Schweitzer was born and reared, to traits of character, the most impressive being his ethical sensitivity and his dominant will, to the Christian factor, especially to the life of Jesus and of St. Paul, to Western thought, particularly to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, a philosopher whom Schweitzer dealt with most fully, to Eastern thought, particularly to that of India, to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and to Johann Sebastian Bach, both of whom Schweitzer dealt with in various works, and to the problem besetting civilization which agitated its author.



In the fourth chapter, an account of the present state of civilization, which Schweitzer sees as in decay and nearing collapse, is presented. His definition of civilization as ultimately ethical is given, the present symptoms of the unethical state of civilization noted, the most prominent being the process of materialization and the suppression of individual personality, and the cause for the decay advanced. The cause for the present unethical state of civilization is seen to be the failure of nineteenth-century philosophy, the nineteenth-century economic and industrial situation, and the Christian religion. As a consequence, modern man is seen to be without a theory of the universe which can halt the disintegration of civilization and even lead him back to true civilization.

Chapter V is devoted to an exposition of Schweitzer's "reverence for life" philosophy, Schweitzer's solution to the present crisis besetting civilization. "Reverence for life" is seen not to arise from knowledge of the world but from the immediate fact of consciousness which is the will-to-live. A product of thought, "reverence for life" contains both world- and life-affirmation and ethics inseparably combined and in Schweitzer's estimation is the theory of the universe which will halt the decay of civilization and lead us back to true civilization. "Reverence for life" is, for Schweitzer, rational, absolute, universal and complete. Also contained in this chapter is an account of Schweitzer's practice of his "reverence for life" philosophy.

Chapter VI is devoted to implications for education of Schweitzer's philosophy. By virtue of his definition of civilization,



the case is made for a new singular goal of education, namely the spiritual perfecting of the individual. As one aspect of this goal, the case is presented for using Schweitzer as one ethical model at the elementary, the secondary and the post-secondary levels of education, and it is shown how Schweitzer might serve as an ethical model at these three levels of education.

Chapter VII serves to conclude this study. The point is made that our age should not nor must not ignore the life and thought of Albert Schweitzer. In the education of today's youth, spiritual development and ethical learning must play an essential part. In this, it is believed that the life and thought of Albert Schweitzer can promote this development and learning.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION, PURPOSE OF STUDY, DEFINITION OF "REFERENCE FOR LIFE" AND ORGANIZATION OF STUDY

#### Introduction

We live in an age characterized by moral confusion. It has, in fact, become commonplace among men at almost all levels of society to judge our age so. It is significant that in a recent public opinion poll conducted by the Canadian Institute of Public Opinion that all countries polled showed a national pessimism in regard to the present morality.<sup>1</sup> In our own country, only 16% believed that morality was improving while 53% believed that morality was worsening. By comparison, national pessimism in the United States was even greater; 8% believed morality was improving while 78% believed it was worsening.

The moral perplexities of our time invite the consideration of any ethical ideal that holds out hope for more enlightened living. Earnest conviction that Albert Schweitzer was a great thinker, as well as a great man, and that he has significance for our times, has led the author to undertake this work.

Wherein does Schweitzer's significance for our age lie? It lies in the example given by his life and by way of his teachings. In

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<sup>1</sup> "Canadians are not very optimistic about prospects for Seventies," Edmonton Journal, December 30, 1968, p. 3.



this, he "speaks" to the people of our age who have found no answer to the query, "What is the meaning of life?" In particular, he addresses himself to those who live without thought, those who turn away from the issue, or are already oppressed by it and have neither belief nor philosophy. As one himself who has doubted and despaired as to the possibility of reaching some solution to the issue, Schweitzer holds out hope through thought. Through thought, he has arrived at an ethical ideal as the basis for more enlightened living. Schweitzer would ask us, with him, to seek our solution through individual reflection so we too may be led away from despair to a more enlightened mode of living.

But Schweitzer's challenge to the men of the age is not merely a call to reflection, it is also a call to action. Because he is the embodiment of his theory, he compels us to remember that ethical thought has no value unless it be taken seriously. If we, like Schweitzer, chose to commit ourselves to a self-understanding that includes compassionate self-devotion as a definition of essential manhood, then we, like Schweitzer, may too wish to take up our share of the burdens of suffering that lies upon the world.

The challenge represented by Schweitzer's life and thought is a challenge not only to the mature, it is also a challenge to the immature, the growing child and youth, and hence it has significant implications for their education. In schools today, particularly in Western schools, ethics is neglected, belittled and ignored. However, by the very nature of education, moral development is part of the process of education. Yet, knowledge of spiritual values, spiritual



self-fulfilment, spiritual self-consciousness and spiritual freedom and responsibility are most often left to the "winds of chance." Ethical education and the wisdom of self-perfection have in large measures been effectively displaced by over-specialization and super-vocationalism. The result is an ethical vacuum at the center of our modern concept of education. Consequently, in the light of our neglect of ethics in our schools, we turn out ethically-immature citizens and hence imperil the world.

### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this thesis is to describe the "reverence for life" philosophy of Albert Schweitzer and to show how Albert Schweitzer may be used as an existential model in an ethically-oriented system of education at the elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels of education. It is hoped that this study will have a three-fold value: first, to bring together the ideas of a great thinker and a great man who, except for his work among the African natives, is not well known on the American Continent; second, to invite, since Schweitzer deals with the most pressing and critical questions of our time and where he advances solutions they are deserving of a wide hearing and sober consideration, critical and penetrating exploration of his complex thought; and, third, to promote, in view of the ethical vacuum in our modern concept of education, the case for moral education.

In the preparation and presentation of this thesis, the author has read Albert Schweitzer's main works related to his philosophy of "reverence for life." Some of these have either not been translated from the German, or were not available in translation, and, in this



case, the author has had to rely on and is indebted to the materials of others. However, it should be noted that in Out of My Life and Thought, Schweitzer does summarize all work undertaken prior to his writing of this autobiography. In the bibliography, readers will find a list of those works of Schweitzer's which have been used in this thesis, including a list of source materials for works of Schweitzer's which have, as yet, not been translated. As well, the author has read a considerable number of books and articles written by Albert Schweitzer or by others on Albert Schweitzer and other books and articles pertaining to related ethical and philosophical problems. Again, readers will find these listed in the bibliography.

We should, at this point, comment on many of the works written on Albert Schweitzer. There have been a vast number of books and articles written on Albert Schweitzer; however, in the majority of these he is sentimentalized and obscured by uncritical affirmation. Often, virtually no attempt is made to see him as he is, that is both in his limitations and shortcomings and in his achievements. This tendency toward unthinking praise is admirably summed up by John Gunther.

He himself is quite conscious of his faults, and mentions in one of his books that he has often been 'arrogant' and 'lacking in love,' and that he has even 'hated, slandered, and defrauded.' In plain fact, the old man has several frailties. His venerated are horrified if these are mentioned; they want their Great Man whole, untattered and undiminished....<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Gunther, John. Inside Africa. New York: Harper and Bros., 1955, p. 712.



It would appear that the tremendous impression created by this moral personality has paralyzed and confused judgments on Schweitzer.

Schweitzer admirers are so disposed to venerate him that it would seem they hold criticism incompatible with reverence. Readers of Herbert M. Phillips' recent book entitled Safari of Discovery: The Universe of Albert Schweitzer<sup>3</sup> will find this in particular evidence. Even more typical of this is the following comment by Dr. Edman, professor of philosophy at Columbia University, who writes, "One cannot quarrel with a saint or a mystical prophet. The sincerity of Dr. Schweitzer's reverence for life is not for a moment in question."<sup>4</sup>

It is regrettable, indeed, that so many books and articles about Schweitzer have been published which do little more than eulogize him. We do not question the value of eulogizing renditions. They do, indeed, have their place in any collection on the life and thought of Albert Schweitzer. It is unfortunate, however, that in such a collection there is a preponderance of these uncritical accounts and it is unfortunate, too, that these accounts are the ones which tend to be most widely circulated. However, it must be recognized that these accounts perform only a partial and impermanent service to Schweitzer. Since the tendency in such treatments is to hero worship, his public image overshadows and isolates him from his thought. Thus the dissemination and influence of Schweitzer's thoughts are impeded

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<sup>3</sup>Phillips, Herbert M. Safari of Discovery: The Universe of Albert Schweitzer. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1958.

<sup>4</sup>New York Times, October 9, 1949, p. 33.



while his fallacies and illusions are perpetuated by protecting them from criticism. It is this uncritical adulation of him which precludes any real understanding of his thought.

Those who understand Schweitzer best admire him because he is a man, not a god. They know that, because he is a man, he is not infallible and indeed makes many mistakes as other men do. Some of his supporters, it is true, try to defend his every idea and thus make a cult of him.<sup>5</sup>

As a result of such accounts, readers are led to an unthinking partiality: neither are they able to discriminate between that which in Schweitzer is valuable and worthy of adoption and that which is not, nor are they in possession of convictions to motivate them to vigorous ethical activity. However, if Albert Schweitzer is to mean anything to the present world, this must be counted as a significant loss. This thought is voiced by Picht, who, although an admitted admirer of Schweitzer, believes his greatness can only be enhanced by an objective assessment of his work.

Albert Schweitzer is a divine gift in troublous times. But unless the blessing is to run away like sand between our fingers that gift must be cherished with a feeling of the utmost responsibility.<sup>6</sup>

Albert Schweitzer himself has in his long lifetime struggled for the truth and his work is testimony of that struggle. If alone this were not sufficient justification for undertaking a critical exploration of Schweitzer, we have Schweitzer's own views on the matter.

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5 . "Twenty Questions About Albert Schweitzer," The Christian Century. 75, October 29, 1958, p. 1243.

6 Picht, Werner, Albert Schweitzer: The Man and His Work, London: Allen and Unwin, 1964, p. 11.



Schweitzer, according to the bulletin issued by the Albert Schweitzer Education Foundation upon the occasion of an essay contest on Schweitzer's thought, which it sponsored in 1959, has urged every thoughtful person to subject him or any other thinker to ruthless criticism.<sup>7</sup> And from his reticence in responding to his critics, a position which Picht describes as "heart-warming and yet dangerous generosity,"<sup>8</sup> it would seem that Schweitzer invites such criticism. He seems content to be a disturber, challenging an age which he characterizes as lacking in thought to resort once again to elemental thinking.

Unfortunately, then, the reaction to Schweitzer's thought is as strange as it is unsatisfactory. On the one hand we have a preponderance of adulatory renditions in which it is all too apparently implied that his thought is immediately understandable, consistent in itself and readily acceptable without clarification. On the other hand, his thought has either been totally ignored, or upon cursory examination, an attitude of reserve, if not indifference, is in evidence, or much or all of it is dismissed as irrelevant. Neither of these reactions is reasonable or tenable.

In spite of the preceding, to date, Schweitzer has not been accorded the attention he deserves as a serious contemporary thinker. Contrary to the implication in the introduction to Picht's book, Albert Schweitzer: The Man and His Work, that all that can be said about

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<sup>7</sup> Clark, Henry. The Ethical Mysticism of Albert Schweitzer. London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1962, p. 217.

<sup>8</sup> Picht, Werner, op. cit., p. 12.



Schweitzer has already been said or will presently be said, it is all too evident from the literature on Schweitzer that this is not the case. There remains much to be discovered about Schweitzer's contributions to the philosophical, theological, and social thought of our age and of future ages.

Yet, the fact remains that Schweitzer has not received sufficient attention. This is to some extent justifiable. First, he is a contemporary thinker whose thought in his lifetime was largely overshadowed by his humanitarian work among the natives of Africa. Part of the blame for this is Schweitzer's. However, it must also be shared with writers whose accounts have tended to eulogize him. It can only be hoped that following his recent death, the powerful impression of his personality will release that hold which has somewhat tended to keep criticism in check. Yet, another reason is the fact that many of the most substantial writings by him or about him have either never been translated into English or have never been brought forward from the obscurity of esoteric periodicals. And a third reason is that serious thinkers have often been led to neglect him because of the formidable ambiguities and contradictions in his own writings.

#### Definition of "Reverence for Life"

"Reverence for life"<sup>9</sup> is an evocative term which gives rise

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<sup>9</sup>Dr. Herbert M. Phillips, who worked with Schweitzer in Lambarene and who has on a number of occasions had discourse with him on his thought, did, in a personal telephone conversation in 1967, suggest that "veneration for existence" is a more appropriate term.



to a variety of interpretations. If it is taken in the ordinary sense of the words, it covers a multitude of attitudes and actions which Schweitzer would hesitate to endorse or might condemn outright. Simply stated, "reverence for life," according to Schweitzer, is a refashioning of the ethic of Jesus "brought to philosophic expression, extended to cosmical form and conceived as an intellectual necessity."<sup>10</sup> It is the fundamental principle of ethics. In practising "reverence for life," man, having acknowledged his kinship with, and responsibility for, all forms of life, which, to him, are sacred, obeys the compulsion to be different from the universe which is in conflict with itself. Thus, he enhances his own life, and in preserving, promoting and helping life, the essence of goodness, he enters into a spiritual relationship with the universe. Its imperative is absolute and knows nothing of compromise ethics. In ethical conflicts, the truly ethical man proceeds subjectively and arbitrarily, but with the highest degree of responsibility. It is, according to Schweitzer, on this concept that the restoration of civilization depends.

### Organization of Study

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter II is devoted to a brief biographical sketch of Albert Schweitzer. Chapter III traces the emergence of "reverence for life" in Albert Schweitzer's career. Chapter IV relates Schweitzer's views with respect to the present state of civilization. Chapter V describes Schweitzer's

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<sup>10</sup> Seaver, George. Albert Schweitzer: The Man and His Mind. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947, p. 285.



solution to the problem besetting civilization. Chapter VI presents a case for moral education and shows in what way the life and thought of Albert Schweitzer might serve as an ethical model in an ethically-oriented system of education at the elementary school level, the secondary school level and the post-secondary school level. Chapter VII serves to conclude this study.



## CHAPTER II

### A BIOGRAPHY OF ALBERT SCHWEITZER

"My life has unfolded like a romance," Albert Schweitzer is quoted as having once said.<sup>1</sup> The more strictly biographical aspects of this "romance" are contained in a group of his works,<sup>2</sup> and in an increasing number of books and articles written about him. The presentation of this account of his life is drawn from these works.

A second child and first son of Louis and Adele Schweitzer was born in a parsonage on January 14, 1875, at Kaysersberg in Upper Alsace. This puny and delicate child was christened Albert in memory of his mother's half-brother.

At the time of his birth, Albert's father was pastor of a small, scattered evangelical congregation amid a Catholic majority in the town of Kaysersberg. A few months later, Louis Schweitzer was inducted pastor at Gunsbach, hence, the Schweitzer family moved to Gunsbach which was thenceforth the permanent family home.

From a sickly child, who, at one time his parents thought had died, Albert, by his second birthday, outstripped both in size and sturdiness the average youngster of his age.

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<sup>1</sup> . "Baffled Kindness," The Christian Century. 56, September 27, 1939, p. 1168.

<sup>2</sup> Memoirs of Childhood and Youth, On the Edge of the Primeval Forest, More from the Primeval Forest, African Notebook and Out of My Life and Thought.



At the age of five, Albert's father, in spite of the custom for children from the professorial classes of society to be enrolled directly in a preparatory school, enrolled him in the village school. Learning to read and write did not come easily to him, and given to daydreaming, Albert failed to exert himself in his studies and consequently proved to be only an average student.

At the age of nine, Albert was enrolled in school at Munster. Still, however, he failed to distinguish himself.

In the summer of 1885, it was decided that Albert would attend the Gymnasium at Mulhausen, an opportunity made possible through the kindness of Louis Schweitzer, his godfather and great uncle, director of the elementary schools in Mulhausen, and his wife, Sophie, who offered to allow Albert to live with them free of cost. Because of his own slackness and his dreaminess, as well as insufficient preparation for the Fifth Form through his private Latin lessons, Albert proved in his first terms at the Gymnasium to be a poor scholar. Through his bad reports, he nearly lost his free place as the son of a parson and it was even hinted by the principal to Albert's father that the best course might be to remove him from the school. With the help, however, of his Form master in the Fourth, Dr. Wehmann, Albert became a more attentive and diligent student and on June 18, 1893, he passed his final matriculation examination, but with the exception of history in the viva voce, he again failed to distinguish himself in either his written papers or in his viva voce.

While at Mulhausen, Albert began his first systematic musical studies, taking regular lessons on the piano from Eugene



Munch, a deeply religious man and a Bach enthusiast. The only musical training Schweitzer had previously received had been the not very systematic teaching begun at the age of five under the tutelage of his father, from Daddy Iltis, church organist at Gunsbach, for whom he was able to substitute by the age of nine, and during vacation periods in Colmar, from the daughter of his godmother, Madame Julie Fellner-Barth. In his early lessons with Munch, Schweitzer made very little progress and Munch came near despairing of him, however, in later lessons he made such progress that Munch informed him that after his confirmation he would be allowed to take lessons on the organ in St. Stephen's. By the age of sixteen, he took his teacher's place at the services and not long after that he played the organ accompaniment of Brahms' Requiem at a concert.

As a result of this progress in his musical studies, it was decided that Albert would spend, as a guest of one of his father's two wealthy brothers, Charles Schweitzer, a distinguished German philosopher at the Sorbonne, a few weeks in Paris in order that he might take a few lessons from Charles Marie Widor, professor at the Conservatory of Music and renowned organist of St. Sulpice, for whom Eugene Munch thought he was now ready. At their first meeting, Widor was so impressed with Albert's rendition of Bach that, in spite of the fact he normally confined his instruction to the members of the organ class at the Conservatory, he not only took him as a student, but he took him gratuitously. For many years thereafter, Widor was Schweitzer's teacher.

In October, 1893, Schweitzer became a student at Strasbourg



University where he took up theology and philosophy concurrently. On May 6, 1898, he passed the first theological examination. As a result of this examination, he was awarded the Goll scholarship valued at 1,200 marks a year for six years with the stipulation that he would undertake the degree of Licentiate in Theology at Strasbourg or repay all monies received.

With the Goll scholarship, Schweitzer decided to pursue his study of philosophy more diligently. He spent the summer of 1898 in Strasbourg, where he lived in the house in the Old Fish Market in which Goethe had lived while he was a student at Strasbourg, and Schweitzer devoted himself to philosophy.

At the end of the summer, Theobald Ziegler suggested to Schweitzer that he should study for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and should tackle Kant's philosophy of religion. On this advice, Schweitzer left Strasbourg in October, 1898 for Paris to study at the Sorbonne and to improve his organ playing under Widor. His musical studies were complemented by his study of musical theory under Gustav Jacobsthal, professor of music at Strasbourg, by J. Phillip and by Marie-Jaell-Trautmann. Then through his acquaintance with Ernst Munch, brother of Eugene and an organist at St. Wilhelm's in Strasbourg who possessed a thorough knowledge of Bach's works, Schweitzer's musical studies were furthered. Ernst even invited Schweitzer to play the organ accompaniment of the Cantatas and the Passion Music of Bach first for rehearsals, and later, in the absence of Eugene, for actual performances.

By the middle of March, 1899, Schweitzer completed his



work on Kant and returned to Strasbourg where he read aloud his finished work to Ziegler. His dissertation met with Ziegler's strong approval and it was decided Schweitzer should take his viva voce at the end of July.

In preparation, Schweitzer spent the summer of 1899 in Berlin, chiefly occupied in reading philosophy. He found time, however, to attend lectures in theology, to participate in psychological studies on the feeling for tone conducted by Karl Stumpf, to practice on the organ, and to acquaint himself with the artistic and intellectual world of Berlin.

At the end of July, 1899, he returned to Strasbourg where he disappointed in his viva voce those whose expectations his dissertation had aroused. He qualified, however, for his doctorate, and on a strong recommendation from Holtzman, his dissertation, Die Religionsphilosophie Kants, Schweitzer's first major work, was published in 1899.<sup>3, 4</sup>

In spite of Ziegler's urging that he qualify as a Privatdozent in the philosophy faculty, Schweitzer decided to set to work earnestly to get his theological Licentiate in order that the Goll scholarship might be available to another. On December 1, 1899, he was appointed Zehr-Vicar at St. Nicholas' in Strasbourg in compliance with the rule requiring a student to serve in a church for a period

<sup>3</sup> The first product of Schweitzer's pen was a short book written in French and published in 1898 under the title Eugene Munch.

<sup>4</sup> No English translation of Schweitzer's doctoral dissertation has, as yet, been made.



between his first and second theological examination. Meanwhile, he began to work on his dissertation to submit in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Licentiate in theology.

On July 15, 1900, Schweitzer took his second theological examination and it was only due to the intervention of Pfarrer Will that he was not failed. With the passing of this examination, he became curate at St. Nicholas'.

Upon the completion of his dissertation, Das Abendmahlproblem auf Grund der Wissenschaftlichen Forschung des 19 Jahrhunderts und der Historischen Berichte,<sup>5</sup> he next passed a colloquium before a commission of the Faculty, and on July 21, 1900, he obtained the degree of Licentiate in theology.

On September 23, 1900, Schweitzer was ordained at St. Nicholas' as a regular curate. In spite of his duties, Schweitzer was able to continue with his religious-historical studies, and, during spring and often during autumn vacations, with his musical studies under Widor. It was during one of these vacation periods that Widor suggested Schweitzer should write an essay for the Paris Conservatory on the nature of Bach's art, a task which during the next few years took a considerable amount of Schweitzer's time.

On May 1, 1901, Schweitzer was provisionally appointed Principal of the Theological Seminary.

By 1902, Schweitzer had completed another dissertation,

<sup>5</sup> No English translation of the work, "The Problem of the Last Supper, a study based on the scientific research of the nineteenth century and the historical accounts," has, as yet, been made.



Das Messianitats- und Leidensgeheimnis Eine Skizze des Lebens Jesu.<sup>6</sup>

This piece of work brought protests from faculty members who disapproved of his method of historical research and who feared his views might confuse the students. Through the influence of Holtzman, however, he managed to secure the position of Privat-dozent. On March 1, 1902, Schweitzer delivered his inaugural lecture before the Theological Faculty at Strasbourg, and in the summer term of 1902, he began his first term of lectures with a course on the Pastoral Epistles. As a result, consequently, of conversations with his students whom, he felt, had practically no knowledge of the history of research into the life of Jesus, Schweitzer began to occupy himself during the next few years with this new task.

On October 1, 1903, Schweitzer was permanently appointed as Principal of the Theological College of St. Thomas, an appointment, in spite of his age, which was requested by the Clergy of Alsace. The appointment offered not only attractive side benefits but assured him of a fairly stable future. Prior to this appointment, Schweitzer completed a third volume on the development of the Last Supper in the primitive and later periods, and as well, a companion study on the history of baptism in the New Testament and in primitive Christianity. However, the history of research into the life of Jesus, a supplement to Das Messianitats- und Leidensgeheimnis Eine Skizze des Lebens Jesu, had grown into a bulky volume and his essay on the nature of

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<sup>6</sup> The English edition bears the title, The Mystery of the Kingdom of God: The Secret of Jesus' Messiahship and Passion.



Bach's art, which, too, had grown into a bulky volume, came in between and prevented him from getting these completed works ready for the press. By 1905, his "essay" on Bach, J. S. Bach. le musicien-poète,<sup>7</sup> was completed and published, and he was nearing the completion of his monumental Von Reimarus zu Wrede.<sup>8</sup>

On October 13, 1905, Schweitzer announced to his parents and some of his intimate acquaintances, by letter from Paris, that he intended to devote himself to medical studies at the beginning of the winter term in order that he might practise medicine in Equatorial Africa. At the same time, realizing his medical studies would make extensive demands on his time, he sent in his resignation as Principal. Later that month, he submitted his name to Professor Fehling, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine. After the difficulty of his enrollment as a student while still a staff member of the university was overcome, Schweitzer, at the close of October, without any guarantee from the Paris Missionary Society, to whom he offered himself as a prospective doctor in its missionary work, that he would be acceptable to them in view of the theological views he held, began several years of medical study.

For Schweitzer, the next few years were exhausting. The

<sup>7</sup> The work was thoroughly revised and enlarged. It was published in German in 1911. The English edition in two volumes bears the title, J. S. Bach.

<sup>8</sup> The English translation bears the title, The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of the Progress from Reimarus to Wrede. This work, thoroughly revised and enlarged, was published in 1913. No English translation of the second German edition has, as yet, been made.



first term of his medical studies were devoted almost entirely to the natural sciences, to which he personally added the study of the pure sciences. But in addition to attending lectures, Schweitzer in the course of his medical studies was engaged in a host of other activities. While he had resigned his post as Principal, which was to become effective in the spring of 1906, he could not bring himself to the immediate resignation of his theological teaching nor of his office of preacher; consequently, he continued to deliver his lectures and to preach almost every Sunday. Then, during the first few months of his medical studies, he completed a book on organ building and organ playing, Deutsche und französische Orgelbaukunst und Orgelkunst,<sup>9</sup> a corollary to his work on Bach, and the final chapter of his Von Reimarus zu Wrede, both of which were published in 1906. Next, after agreeing in the autumn of 1905 to undertake a German edition of his French Bach, he rewrote it; the 1908 German Bach, J. S. Bach, was nearly twice as long as his French Bach. As well, he undertook a study of the teaching of St. Paul, completing the history of the various interpretations of the writing of St. Paul, Geschichte der Paulinischen Forschung von der Reformation bis auf die Gegenwart,<sup>10</sup> in 1911, and nearly completing his exposition of the thought world of St. Paul. Too, he found time to revise and enlarge his book on the history of research

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<sup>9</sup>No English translation of this brief work has, as yet, been made.

<sup>10</sup>The English edition bears the title, Paul and his Interpreters: A Critical History.



into the life of Jesus, a work published in 1913 under the title Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung. Then, toward the end of his medical studies, at the request of Widor, Schweitzer, in collaboration with him, completed the first five volumes of eight on Bach's sonatas, concertos, preludes and fuges. Aside from writing, Schweitzer undertook the organ part of all the Paris Bach Society's concerts each winter, and also those of the Orfeo Catala at Barcelona. In addition, he undertook several concert engagements in France and in Germany. Further, Schweitzer travelled to examine as many organs as was possible and to discuss these personally or by letter with both organists and builders, giving gratuitous advice on the care and preservation of old organs.

On May 14, 1908, Schweitzer successfully passed the Physikum examination. This was followed by three years of clinical study and the state medical examinations, the last of which he took on December 17, 1911.

He had next to complete a year of internship and to write a thesis. While completing these, Schweitzer began to make preparations for the establishment of a small hospital in Africa. To his own small resources, having obtained the balance of the necessary funds by begging, by giving concerts and lectures, and by accepting donations, Schweitzer presented himself to the Paris Missionary Society, offering to serve at his own expense in its work on the Ogowe River from the Mission Station at Lambarene. While objections to his theological views were raised by some of the orthodox members of the committee, after promising he only wanted to practice medicine, his offer was finally accepted and the Society agreed to place at his disposal one of



the houses at their Lambarene station and allow him to build a hospital on their grounds. In the spring of 1912, Schweitzer resigned from the University and from St. Nicholas' and journeyed to Paris to study tropical medicines and begin the purchase of the supplies needed for Africa.

On June 18, 1912, Schweitzer married Helene Marianne Bresslau, a nurse, daughter of a famous historian and of a distinguished Jewish trading family.

Having completed his internship and his dissertation, Die Psychiatrische Beurteilung Jesu,<sup>11</sup> which was published in 1913, Schweitzer, in February 1913, received the degree of Doctor of Medicine and with the help of influential friends secured permission from the French Colonial Department to practice as a doctor in the Gabon.

On Easter Monday, the Schweitzers boarded the ship Europe and on Tuesday afternoon, with their personal luggage, and some seventy cases of supplies, left Europe for the River Ogowe. They arrived there on April 16, 1913.

At Lambarene, Schweitzer began what he called his "moral experiment."<sup>12</sup> With the assistance of his wife, Schweitzer, without

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<sup>11</sup>The English edition bears the title, The Psychiatric Study of Jesus: Exposition and Criticism.

<sup>12</sup>Feschotte, Jacques. Albert Schweitzer: An Introduction. Boston: Beacon Press, 1955, p. 70.



the promised corrugated iron building in which to treat his patients, set to work. The first hospital, established a few weeks later, was a former fowlhouse. In view of the number of patients requiring medical attention, the need for more adequate facilities made urgent the building of a new hospital, and by November a two-room corrugated hospital had been completed. In the next few months, aside from his medical duties, Schweitzer completed a number of other buildings constructed out of unhewn logs and raffia leaves.

On October 2, 1914, having just returned from Cape Lopez, where he sought medical attention, Schweitzer's work was severely curtailed when he was informed by the French colonial officials that he and his wife were prisoners of war. However, through the efforts of Widor, by the end of November they were released and Schweitzer was once more able to devote himself freely to the sick.

In September, 1917, having again resumed work after a period of recuperation at Cape Lopez, the Schweitzers were informed an order had been received for their internment in a prisoner-of-war camp in Europe. Returned to Europe as prisoners of war, the Schweitzers spent their time in the next few months in various camps in the Caserne de Passage at Bordeaux, at Garaison in the Pyrenees, and in the convent of St. Paul de Mausole near St. Remy. After nearly a year of internment, the Schweitzers, in poor health, were shipped back to Germany on July 13, 1918.

After a major operation on September 1, the after effects of dysentery contacted at Bordeaux, Schweitzer, temporarily without a means of support when he was capable of work again, finally accepted



a position in the department for diseases of the skin in the municipal hospital in Strasbourg. As well, he accepted an appointment as curate at St. Nicholas'.

In the spring of 1920, Schweitzer, having accepted an invitation from Archbishop Soderblom to deliver some lectures for the Olaus-Petri Foundation at the University of Upsala, journeyed to Sweden. While in Sweden, he gave a series of organ concerts and lectures and was able to realize sufficient funds to repay the most pressing of his debts. It was in Sweden, too, he resolved after toying with the idea of resuming his work as a teacher, possibly in Switzerland, to continue his work at Lambarene. And finally it was in Sweden that Schweitzer was commissioned to pen his recollections of Africa. These are contained in his Zwitschen Wasser und Urwald,<sup>13</sup> published in 1920.

In 1921, Schweitzer resigned from his two posts at Strasbourg and planned to support himself as a writer and as an organist. With his wife and daughter, Rhena, who was born on his birthday in 1919, Schweitzer moved to his father's vicarage in Gunsbach. In spite of his acceptance of numerous invitations to lecture and to give organ recitals, both of which took him to many European countries, Schweitzer by 1923 had completed three more works: Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen,<sup>14</sup> Kulturphilosophie 1: Verfall und Wiederaufbau

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<sup>13</sup>The English edition bears the title, On the Edge of the Primeval Forest.

<sup>14</sup>The English edition bears the title, Christianity and the Religions of the World.



der Kultur,<sup>15</sup> and Kulturphilosophie II: Kultur and Ethik.<sup>16</sup> In 1924, he completed another work, Aus Meiner Kindheit und Jugendzeit.<sup>17</sup>

After having purchased a house at Konigsberg in 1923 for his wife and child, and after having completed his medical training by taking an additional course in dental surgery and obstetrics and supplementing his knowledge of tropical hygiene by attending lectures on this subject at the Institute for Tropical Hygiene at Hamburg, Schweitzer, as a result of his own lectures and concert engagements and his writings, as well as donations, had sufficient funds to resume his work in Lambarene, and after the necessary supplies were purchased and packed, unaccompanied, left Europe once more for Lambarene in February, 1924.

Arriving at Lambarene on April 19, after a journey which afforded many stops, including one into the British Cameroons where he discussed the possibility of starting another hospital, possibly at an abandoned station of the Basle Mission named Nyasoso, Schweitzer found his hospital in the most disheartening state of deterioration and ruin. After making the most urgent repairs, in the months that followed he divided his time between doctoring and building. With the

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<sup>15</sup> The English edition bears the title, The Decay and the Restoration of Civilization.

<sup>16</sup> The English edition bears the title, Civilization and Ethics.

<sup>17</sup> The English edition bears the title, Memoirs of Childhood and Youth.



arrival of a nurse in July and a doctor in October, and another doctor and nurse in 1925, the strain on Schweitzer was greatly relieved and he was able to devote his time to repairing and building, made necessary by the increasing number of native and white patients. By 1925, the hospital had been rebuilt.

With the increasing number of patients, then an outbreak of dysentery in June, 1925, and a severe famine in the autumn of the same year, Schweitzer, realizing further extension of the hospital was impossible, applied to the District Commissioner for a concession of 172 acres, one and three-quarter miles upstream, where there was a spacious valley not far from the river division for a hospital and gently rolling hills for dwellings.

With the granting of this concession and with the enthusiastic help of his staff, by January 21, 1927, a sufficient number of buildings had been completed that the removal of the patients from the old hospital to the newer hospital, made from hardwood and corrugated iron, was begun. In the next few months, a number of new buildings were added to the hospital compound.

On July 21, 1927, Schweitzer left Lambarene for Europe. Here on behalf of Lambarene, he accepted numerous invitations from a number of European countries to lecture and to play the organ. Then, too, during this period of rest, he received numerous visitors, purchased supplies for the hospital, sought recruits of doctors and nurses to replace those who had to return. As well, he designed the plans for a house, which, with the Goethe Prize money he had received, he decided to build in Gunsbach for the lodging of hospital



personnel who would be vacationing in Europe. During his leisure time, he worked to bring to completion his study of St. Paul, completing all but the last chapter which was written December, 1929, aboard ship between Bordeaux and Cape Lopez. This work, Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus,<sup>18</sup> was published in 1930.

In Lambarene once again, Schweitzer found it necessary to undertake the construction of more buildings and in the next twelve months, aside from his work at the hospital, he made several additions to the hospital. In his spare time, from sketches put together during intervals of leisure time during his second sojourn at Lambarene, he completed another volume on the forest hospital, Das Urwaldspital zu Lambarene.<sup>19</sup> As well, he enlarged a brief auto-biographical sketch he had written in 1929 to include a review of his life and literary work. This work was published in 1931, bearing the title Aus Meinem Leben und Denken.<sup>20</sup> Further, he worked on the third volume of his philosophy of civilization, which was interrupted by an invitation to deliver the memorial address on the hundredth anniversary of the death of Goethe.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> The English edition bears the title, The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle.

<sup>19</sup> The first English edition bears the title, More from the Primeval Forest. It was published in the United States as The Forest Hospital at Lambarene (New York: Macmillan Co., 1948).

<sup>20</sup> The English edition bears the title, Out of My Life and Thought.

<sup>21</sup> In 1949, Charles R. Joy translated Schweitzer's addresses on Goethe (Goethe: Four Studies, Boston: Beacon Press).



Early in 1932, Schweitzer returned to Europe. After delivering the Goethe Memorial Oration at the Frankfurt celebrations on March 22, Schweitzer, on behalf of Lambarene, delivered lectures and gave recitals in a number of European countries. Aside from receiving the now usual host of visitors from all parts of the world, tending to his vast correspondence, and giving his time and energy in meeting numerous other requests, Schweitzer, in his spare time, studied and wrote about the Chinese and Indian philosophies.

After making the usual necessary preparations, Schweitzer left Europe on March 16, 1933. In his leisure time, while in Africa, he worked on the third volume of his philosophy of civilization and on the Gifford Lectures which he promised to deliver in 1934 and 1935.

In February, 1934, Schweitzer returned to Europe, where after completing his Hibbert and Gifford Lectures, he travelled to Britain where they were delivered. Before returning again to Lambarene in February, 1935, from the material he had on the evolution of Indian thought, he completed another work for publication, Die Weltanschauung du Indischen Denker.<sup>22</sup> As well, he made a series of records of Bach's works at the Church of St. Aurelia in Strasbourg on an organ which he had himself rebuilt.

Schweitzer's fifth sojourn in Lambarene lasted only seven months, and on August 22, 1935, he was again in Europe to deliver the second series of Gifford Lectures in early November. As well,

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<sup>22</sup>The English edition bears the title, Indian Thought and Its Development.



while in Britain, he gave a series of lectures and concerts, including a recording series on the organ of All Hallows' Church for the Columbia Broadcasting System of America. Aside from a series of lectures and concerts given in the spring of 1936 throughout Switzerland, the further recordings made in October on the organ of St. Aurelia's for Columbia Records of London, most of his time in Europe was spent at the Guest House in Gunsbach where he translated his book on Indian thought into French and worked on the third volume of his philosophy of civilization.

At the end of January, 1937, Schweitzer once more set sail for Africa, arriving in Lambarene on February 18. The increasing responsibilities at the hospital left him little time to bring to completion his manuscript on the philosophy of civilization, which had, by now, grown into such proportions that he considered publishing two volumes instead of one. He finally decided to compress his thoughts into a single volume and separately publish the chapters on the Chinese philosophers. He did find time, however, to complete a little volume of anecdotes upon the ideas and the lives of the natives, Afrikanische Geschichten.<sup>23</sup>

For one of his periodic breaks in routine, Schweitzer left Africa on January 10, 1939, arriving in Europe on February 1. Requiring rest, he proceeded directly to Gunsbach. Sensing, however, that war was imminent, in the next ten days, Schweitzer made provision for his wife and child in Switzerland, and procured needed supplies for the hospital.

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<sup>23</sup>The English edition bears the title, From My African Notebook.



Leaving Europe on February 12, he arrived at Lambarene on March 3, and began immediately to prepare the hospital for the possibility of war. During the next few months, what funds he had were used to procure drugs and other necessary supplies. Then, with the loss of two doctors and nurses in the spring and summer of 1939, and with the need to practice all necessary economies, Schweitzer in early September, dismissed from the hospital all but the seriously ill.

In September, 1939, war broke out in Europe. In October and November, 1940, fighting both in the air and on the ground for the occupation of Lambarene took place between the Vichy French and the London-based French Provisional Government.

It was with considerable difficulty that the hospital was operated during the war years. In the early years of the war, Schweitzer considered closing the hospital and returning to Europe. However, he decided to continue his work, and it was only through his and his staff's efforts, and through the donations from various countries, that the hospital was able to continue operating. Besides tending to the treatment of patients, Schweitzer during the war years undertook the clearing and cultivation of more land, the restaking of the plantation and the building of several hundred yards of retaining walls to protect the garden and the repaired streets.

World peace in 1945 failed to bring the relief in help or in reduced prices for supplies that Schweitzer had expected. Hence he had to abandon his hope of returning immediately to Europe. By 1948, through the arrival of fresh doctors and nurses, and through the donations of friends of the hospital, Schweitzer was able to return



once more to Europe.

In 1949, having been urged for years to visit the United States, and having received numerous invitations from academic, musical and ecclesiastical quarters, Schweitzer, after twice declining, finally accepted an invitation to deliver the memorial address at the Goethe bicentenary celebrations which were being held in the United States that year at Aspen, Colorado.

In October, 1949, Schweitzer was again back in Lambarene. Aside from his hospital duties, much of his time during the next many months was devoted to work at the leper village which he undertook to build. Schweitzer and his hospital were now famous and visitors from many parts of the world now journeyed to Lambarene to see this man and to view his work.

In May, 1951, Schweitzer returned to Europe. Aside from short visits to a number of European countries, most of his time was spent with his frail and ailing wife at the Guest House in Gunsbach. Here he produced a long-promised "Epilogue" on the subject of New Testament eschatology for Colonel Mozely's book, The Theology of Albert Schweitzer, attended to his vast volume of mail, received the usual stream of visitors, and posed for films and made recordings on the Gunsbach church organ for Erica Anderson's documentary of his life.

In December 1951, Schweitzer returned to Africa, where, aside from his hospital duties, he worked at enlarging the hospital and repairing the bamboo huts at the leper village.

In July, 1952, Schweitzer was back in Europe for a brief



stay. Here he was principally engaged with the completion of the three final volumes of Bach's organ works, and in making recordings of Bach, Widor and Cesar Franck.

Schweitzer, in November, 1952, returned to Africa. His main pre-occupation during the next many months was, in memory of his mother, who was killed on July 3, 1916, when knocked down by German soldiers on horseback, and of his father, who died in 1925 at the age of ninety-seven, the construction of a new leper village to be located about a half mile from the main hospital, and was to be of permanent construction with concrete foundations, hardwood timbers, raffia walls, and corrugated iron roofs. During this undertaking, on October 30, 1953, Schweitzer received word that the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize, which carried roughly \$36,000, had been awarded to him by the Norwegian Committee. In order that he might continue with his work at the leper colony, he requested that the obligation of travelling to Oslo to receive the Prize and deliver the usual address be deferred.

In June, 1954, Schweitzer returned to Africa from Europe. Most of his time during the next many months was spent in bringing to completion the leprosy hospital.

He returned to Europe in May, 1955, and, after a brief rest, returned to Africa in December, 1955. In 1957, he extended the hospital to accommodate another one hundred beds, thus, apart from the leper village, the hospital accommodated 350 patients, and had a staff of three or four full-time doctors, excluding Schweitzer, about a dozen white nurses, ten male orderlies, and a number of native men and women who performed the many menial tasks for the



hospital.

On the death of his wife in May, 1957, Schweitzer returned to Europe, returning to Africa in December.

In August, 1959, Schweitzer made his last visit to Europe, returning to Lambarene in 1960. During the next few years, he undertook further enlargement of the hospital with the addition of several new buildings for the increased number of patients and staff of doctors and nurses. Then, aside from the administration of the hospital, he was kept active receiving the ever-increasing number of guests, tending to his heavy correspondence, including his campaign against nuclear tests, and working on his unfinished literary undertakings.

Two short books were produced during this period: Die Autobiographie des Pelikan<sup>24</sup> and Die Lehre von der Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben.<sup>25</sup>

On August 23, 1965, Schweitzer fell ill and sent for his daughter to whom he handed a letter containing detailed instructions for the future direction of the hospital upon his death. On August 28, he suffered a cerebral stroke and his condition steadily worsened. On September 2, he lapsed into a coma which continued to deepen and at 11:30 p. m. on September 4, 1965, Albert Schweitzer passed away.

On September 5, after a simple service led by Dr. Munz, a thirty-eight-year-old Swiss physician, who, according to Schweitzer's wishes, was to become Chief of Medicine upon his death, Schweitzer's

<sup>24</sup>The English edition bears the title, The Story of My Pelican.

<sup>25</sup>The English edition bears the title, The Teaching of Reverence for Life.



daughter, Rhena, becoming administrator of the hospital, the body of Dr. Albert Schweitzer, in a plain wooden coffin, was lowered into a grave dug by leper patients and beside the urn containing the ashes of his wife.



## CHAPTER III

### EMERGENCE OF "REVERENCE FOR LIFE" AS AN ETHICAL IDEAL IN THE CAREER OF ALBERT SCHWEITZER

Albert Schweitzer's "Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben,"<sup>1</sup> "respect de la vie,"<sup>2</sup> "veneratio vitae,"<sup>3</sup> "reverence for life,"<sup>4</sup> the phrase used by Schweitzer to condense the significance of his ethical mysticism, is considered by himself to be his most important accomplishment, and, according to Babel,<sup>5</sup> Schweitzer thought the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to him for his discovery of "reverence for life" as the outcome of elemental thinking.

Let us now attempt to ascertain what factors contributed to the emergence of this philosophy, a philosophy, according to Schweitzer, on which the restoration of the civilization of the world depends.

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<sup>1</sup> Feschotte, Jacques, op. cit., p. 72. (Feschotte, p. 3, claims the phrase in German has a "nuance of fear" which is lacking in the English equivalent)

<sup>2</sup> Clark, Henry, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics. London: A. and C. Black, 1929, p. XVIII.

<sup>4</sup> The English translation of the German phrase is "reverence for life."

<sup>5</sup> Babel, Henry, La Pense d'Albert Schweitzer. Neuchatel: H. Messeihler Editions, 1956, p. 206.



When attempting to investigate the mature thought of some outstanding thinker, one will usually find, as a result of environmental factors and of character factors, a basis in one's childhood and youth. Students of Schweitzer's life seem largely to agree that his mature thought was to a considerable degree the product of his background and of his character and that attitudes later prominent were already present during childhood days.<sup>6</sup> This conclusion is especially well expressed by Augustiny who writes:

Later, as we shall see, when the fullness of his talents is revealed, the whole of the adult Schweitzer, the man fulfilled, was already implicit in the boy. In the child was implanted the future spiritual guide and theologian, the author of critical-historical expositions of the life of Jesus, the thinker whose philosophy is constructed on rational bases, however rooted in mystical insights, the musician and the student of Bach. The friend of man is already recognisable, and also the founder of his ethical system---that which requires reverence of all living things. Perhaps one can go even further. In his early awakened inclinations toward natural sciences, one can already see the impulses that led him to become a physician, and when one learns that his father, every month, discussed and held family readings on the memoirs of missionaries to the Bantus, then one can truly believe that behind the picture of the youth one sees a backdrop of that coast of the Dark Continent with which his fate would be intertwined.<sup>7</sup>

Seldom, however, in such an investigation is there available thoroughly-reliable sources of information about a person's childhood and youth. But where Albert Schweitzer is concerned, we are in the fortunate position of having a very simple but most charming little

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<sup>6</sup> . "Albert Schweitzer, Missionary, Musician, Physician," Living Age. 322, August 2, 1924.

<sup>7</sup> Augustiny, Waldemar, The Road to Lambarene, London: F. Muller Ltd., 1956, p. 36.



autobiography, Memoirs of Childhood and Youth. Of the vast number of books that have been written about Albert Schweitzer, his personality and his work, all have had at some time to make reference to this book as their source for understanding the essentials of the phenomenon Schweitzer. While the worth of autobiographical accounts admittedly depend upon the author's ability to discern and describe his own qualities and upon the author's absolute integrity, in Schweitzer's case, being the courageous seeker after truth that he is, and with his integrity, we can with some degree of confidence assume that the description of his experiences and his own reflections on them are as sober and factual as one could wish, and while this book was published when he was forty-nine years of age, we can be reasonably safe in presuming his memory was good and was not to any considerable degree an obstacle in reproducing his material.

#### Environmental Factors

A character grows very much like a plant in that from the soil and air it draws the materials that it needs for its growth. A variety of authors have attempted to assess the import of these for the emergence of Schweitzer's "reverence for life." Some have attributed Schweitzer's ethical orientation to peculiarities of his Alsatian origin;<sup>8</sup> others to a greater or lesser degree have implied it.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Lind, Emil, Albert Schweitzer: Aus Seinem Leben und Werk, Bern: Paul Haupt, 1948, p. 181.

<sup>9</sup>Picht, Werner, Albert Schweitzer: The Man and His Work, London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1964, p. 27.



In support of this contention, it has been variously suggested that the landscape, the society of Alsatian peasants and artisans, simple, devout, honest, hardworking, and mindful of traditions, the geographical position of Alsace, which has tended to underaccentuate national differences, and the significance of the edict of Louis XIV, which provided that Protestant villages in which there were a minority of seven Catholic families had to share the chancel, resulting, in many Alsatian villages, in a religious tolerance, has in some measure played an indeterminate part in the life of Albert Schweitzer and consequently in his mature thought. Some further weight is given to this contention by Jeschke<sup>10</sup> who cites Ernest Barthele, author of Elsassische Geistesschicksale, who claims to have independently arrived at the same objective truth in respect to his views on civilization and to reverence for life as Albert Schweitzer, and he attributes this to a common racial disposition.

More apparent as a factor was Schweitzer's ancestry. Of this Magnus C. Ratter writes, "Were it in our power to choose an ancestry for one destined to be a prophet, a preacher to the nations, we could not have discovered any other family where all the influences would have been so favourable," and "If we were allowed to set and train our spiritual leaders it is difficult to feel we could improve upon the environment of his boyhood."<sup>11</sup> Schweitzer's skill as an organist,

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<sup>10</sup> Jeschke, Reuben P. "Reverence for Life as an Ethical Ideal" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation) Columbia University, 1951, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Ratter, Magnus C., op. cit., p. 15.



his aptitude for scholarly pursuits and for teaching, and his devotion to the work of an evangelist were all inherited: his father was a dedicated pastor; his paternal grandfather was a schoolmaster and an organist, as were also his grandfather's brothers; his maternal grandfather, Pastor Schillinger, an enthusiastic adherent of the Enlightenment Movement, was an organist of some repute with a fine gift for improvisation; his mother's brother, Albert, after whom Schweitzer's mother consecrated his life to be as similarly noble, was also a pastor. With respect to this latter fate, Schweitzer wrote, "The thought of how I could provide, as it were, a continuation of a man whom my mother had loved so much haunted me a great deal, especially as I had heard so many stories of his kindness."<sup>12</sup> With the exception, perhaps, of his skill as an organist, the above inherited traits were all orientated in the direction of "reverence for life."

From his parents, Schweitzer inherited and/or acquired certain qualities of character which were significant for his ethical development. Of his parents, Schweitzer gives us a very sketchy picture, however, the depth of his filial love is certainly in evidence. While we can not explicitly identify any particular quality he may have inherited or acquired from his father, whom Schweitzer referred as "my dearest friend,"<sup>13</sup> this man, the embodiment of capable activity and sensitive humanity, a truly splendidly-balanced nature,

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<sup>12</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Memoirs of Childhood and Youth, London: Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1924, p. 39.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 81.



possessed a number of virtuous qualities: simplicity, sincerity, gentleness, sensitivity, humility, dedication, benevolence, generosity, among others. Identification with his father, no doubt, did much to invite and promote Albert's ethical development. From his mother, to whom deep and beautiful homage is paid by the simple sentence, "But we understood each other without using words,"<sup>14</sup> Schweitzer admits he inherited a passionate temper, a characteristic which she in turn had inherited from her father, and a reservedness. These two inherited traits would, at first, appear to be somewhat detrimental to his ethical development. However, in Schweitzer, recognition of them resulted in a limiting of their manifestations. Hence, they actually promoted his ethical development by their very presence.

Schweitzer grew up in the Gunsbach parsonage. The spiritual climate of the home, mainly owing to Pastor Schillinger, was to a large extent determined by the Epoch of the Enlightenment, while Christian culture appointed the course of the days, the relations between family members and the intercourse with friends and neighbors. As a consequence, a spirit of truth, tolerance, brotherhood, and respect for man prevailed in the home. Nature, mountain, meadow, forest, reached down into the parsonage and so Albert developed indeed as a child of nature. But also there looked down on the home the walls and towers of the church, the clanging of the church bell and the humming of the organ sounding out over the home, and the child of nature was introduced to divine service long before he learned to read and write. Thus, before his intellect was clear, it

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 34.



was confided to him that he belonged to both the natural and supernatural realms. Schweitzer's personal relationship to this background is of unusual fervor. When he went off to school in Mulhausen, he suffered much from a homesick longing for the church at Gunsbach, and the familiar church service, about which he wrote, "From the services in which I joined as a child I have taken with me into life a feeling for what is solemn, and a need for quiet and self-recollection, without which I cannot realize the meaning of my life."<sup>15</sup> It is not surprising that years later Schweitzer, with the Goethe Prize money, chose to build his home for his European sojourns at Gunsbach.

Schweitzer had an early inner relation with nature. Some credit for this must be given to his parents--to the traditional family walk on Sunday, to the many days Louis Schweitzer spent on the hills with his children during their summer vacations, and to the many family picnics. Then, through his walks to and from school at Munster in which his sense of awe in the face of the beauty and mystery of the natural world impelled him to try to give expression through poetry and sketching to feelings aroused in him by Nature. When it was decided that he should attend the Gymnasium at Mulhausen, Schweitzer, feeling that he "were being torn away from Nature,"<sup>16</sup> secretly cried over this lot for hours. At Mulhausen, he brooded for hours over his separation from nature, and when this was noticed by

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 52.



his aunt, she took him for walks. Later, when he was older, he was permitted restricted outdoor pleasures and Schweitzer chose to spend many delightful and solitary hours amongst Nature.

For Schweitzer, Nature was a mystery: it was warm and friendly yet aloof and terrifying, sustaining life yet destroying it. In the beginning, he eagerly followed the instruction in the natural sciences, yet he was, at the same time, becoming increasingly aware of how little is really known of the processes of Nature. While the reality of Nature, he felt, could be very exactly observed and recorded through science, the mystery of Nature continued to be a mystery, if not more mysterious. Finally, he came to meet the scientific texts with positive aversion. His youthful thoughts on the overwhelming mystery of life, which deepened with years, inclined him toward a mental attitude of reverent agnosticism. Since this played a major part in his philosophy, we here quote Schweitzer's youthful thoughts at some length.

Their confident explanations--carefully shaped and trimmed with a view to being learnt by heart, and, as I soon observed, already somewhat out of date--satisfied me in no respect. It seemed to me laughable that the wind, the rain, the snow, the hail, the formation of clouds, the spontaneous combustion of hay, the trade-winds, the Gulf Stream, thunder and lightning, should all have found their proper explanation. The formation of drops of rain, of snow-flakes, and of hailstones had always been a special puzzle to me. It hurt me to think that we never acknowledge the absolutely mysterious character of Nature, but always speak so confidently of explaining her, whereas all that we have really done is to go into fuller and more complicated descriptions, which only make the mysterious more mysterious than ever. Even at that age, it became clear to me that what we label Force or "Life" remains in its own essential nature for ever inexplicable. <sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 71.



### Character Factors

The environment does not form the man. Should it be otherwise, it could not happen that siblings from the same environment would follow such different paths and develop each in such a different way. Why, for instance, has Paul Schweitzer not developed in the same way and followed the same life-enterprise as his older brother, Albert? The fact that he has not, nor have countless others, products of the same environment, developed and followed the same path as their brothers and sisters, makes it obvious that there is yet another factor which we must yet consider, namely character. The milieu, then, offers the nourishment from which character itself is formed but for that to act as a determinant presupposes one is able and willing to make use of the milieu, and, then, of the early lessons of life. Naturally this presupposes not only the ability to experience, but to make use of experience. In Schweitzer's case, a mere shadow of an event not only registered on him but left an indelible impression, and served to enhance subsequent impressions. This tendency of impressionability in him is especially well described by Picht, who writes:

As far back as his memory reaches, Schweitzer's nature always reacted strongly and often vehemently to every stimulus. . . . Each happening is experienced in its full magnitude and significance, and then added as a permanent part of his inner possessions. And each happening becomes an experience. There is never a superficial, half-hearted indifferent or self-indulgent reaction to the demands of life. Nothing is ever lost which might contribute to the development of his inner personality.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Picht, W. R. V., op. cit., p. 32.



Impressive evidence of this is provided in his Memoirs of Childhood and Youth.

From this autobiographical account, two powerful traits in his personality are immediately evident: a moral sensitivity and an extraordinary power of will. Without these traits, Schweitzer would undoubtedly have developed in a way far different from that which he did.

First, and foremost, there is the existence of a dominant will. This aspect of Schweitzer's personality showed itself remarkably early in his life. An illuminating example of this occurred after accepting a challenge to wrestle George Nitschelm. Schweitzer, who was not particularly well-received by his village schoolmates because of his natural shyness and because, as the son of a parson, he was considered a "sprig of the gentry," that evening refused to eat the broth which was served him because he remembered George Nitschelm's words, "Yes, if I got broth to eat twice a week, as you do, I should be as strong as you are!" and this normally obedient boy thereafter refused to wear a warm overcoat because the other boys did not have one, refused to wear anything but a common brown cap, fingerless gloves and wooden clogs on weekdays, and in spite of the long battle with his parents over the issue and the punishment he incurred, he remained adamant.

There is no doubt that Schweitzer very early understood the necessity of deliberately employing his will power to encourage the good side of his character. We have numerous examples of this. In spite of his desire to be like his schoolmates, he found the strength of



will to emancipate himself from their influence, dissuading them from practising acts of cruelty against the dumb creation, and joining the persecuted Jew, Mausche, on his trips through the village. He gave up cards because of his passionate intensity in games. Because of the conscientiousness and devotion to duty of Dr. Wehman, one of his teachers at the Gymnasium, he was so ashamed of his own slackness that he undertook to emulate him. He successfully mastered the languages and mathematics, subjects, in school, for which he felt he had no special talent. Later, at the university, he successfully mastered Hebrew. On January 1, 1899, because it had developed into a passion with him, he gave up smoking. While we could cite numerous other examples which show the extraordinary will power of this man, we might conclude by pointing out that he took degrees in philosophy and theology while conscientiously pursuing his musical studies and later he simultaneously exercised four or five different activities while taking his medical degree. Of Schweitzer's indomitable will, Picht writes, "In this respect the suggestion of 'a very persistent' influence on the part of Schopenhauer is an error. In fact, Schweitzer himself denies it, but apart from this it is obvious that such a character trait can hardly spring from philosophic thought--and certainly not from philosophic thought at second hand--but must be inborn."<sup>19</sup> Ratter writes, "This power of the will explains why in Schweitzer's philosophy the central thought is, 'I am will to live in the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 32.



midst of will to live.''"<sup>20</sup>

The second trait in Schweitzer's personality is his moral sensitivity. Of this tendency in Schweitzer's nature, we have an illustration which occurred remarkably early in his life, in fact, he was still in petticoats. On the occasion, a bee had stung his hand. Finding that his cries made him the object of considerable attention, he continued with his lamentations long after the pain had disappeared, disregarding his conscience which had told him to stop. For such conduct, Schweitzer felt ashamed and was miserable for the balance of the day.

Another aspect of Schweitzer's ethical sensitiveness was his deep personal suffering at the misery of the world around him. Of this aspect, Schweitzer writes, "As far back as I can remember I was saddened by the amount of misery I saw in the world around me. Youth's unqualified *joie de vivre* I never really knew, and I believe this to be the case with many children, even though they appear outwardly merry and quite free from care."<sup>21</sup> Being a sensitive youngster, just as he was later a sensitive adult, he, no doubt, felt the impact of these occasions more fully and more dramatically.

Schweitzer himself was no stranger to suffering. He suffered considerably because of childhood fears: he feared his unruly hair indicated an inward unruliness; he feared that the two prominent bumps on his forehead indicated that he was growing horns, as if to

<sup>20</sup> Ratter, Magnus, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>21</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Memoirs of Childhood and Youth, p. 39.



renew the Miracle of Moses; and, he feared that he was to be measured for a Prussian soldier's suit of iron clothes. He probably first became aware of the suffering experienced by others through his father's suffering with rheumatism and his mother's endless suffering over the management of the household on the meagre salary of Schweitzer's father. And probably, too, he became even more aware of the amount and nature of human suffering that prevailed in the world through his father's attendance to his pastoral duties, including a monthly Sunday afternoon service which was devoted to the life and work of missionaries among the blighted Africans. At school, he came to note the miserable home conditions of some of his school-mates. There was the persecuted Mausche. There was also the statue of Admiral Bruat in Colmar, standing erect before the figure of a kneeling African. This statue to colonial exploits directed his attention to the suffering of the African negroes; John A. O'Brien even dates Schweitzer's concern with the ruthless dealings of men with each other from this experience.<sup>22</sup> There can be little doubt, however, that this statue was of more than passing influence in Schweitzer's life for he has written, "It was this statue of Bartholdi which summoned me, at the age of thirty, to live and work in Africa."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> . "God's Eager Fool," Reader's Digest, 48, March, 1946, p. 43.

<sup>23</sup> Feschotte, Jacques, "Childhood Reflections of Old Colmar," Albert Schweitzer: An Introduction. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1954, p. 113.



Then, while at University, where Schweitzer devoted himself to social work, he came even more intimately and more dramatically in contact with acute human misery.

Human misery and suffering was in itself a grim and saddening spectacle enough, but that the dumb creation should also be tormented with such excess of pain and cruelty particularly moved him. He was haunted for weeks, he tells us, by the sight of an old limping horse tugged forward by one man while another kept beating it with a stick to get it to the knacker's yard at Colmar. Consequently from this, and from such other experiences, even before he began school, it seemed to him incomprehensible that he should pray for human beings only, so to his evening prayers, he added a silent prayer, which he composed himself, for all living creatures.

In spite of an early declared compassion for all suffering, Schweitzer on numerous occasions thoughtlessly succumbed to temptation only to feel immediately after strong, often overwhelming pangs of remorse. Several illustrations of this can be cited. He struck his sister because she played cards carelessly. He demonstrated before a singing class and his teacher, whose musical talent was limited, his own ability with creative harmony. He made a thoughtless gibe about one of his teachers and was betrayed. He was conscious of his power over the family dog and with a stick drove the dog into a corner, striking him when he tried to break away. He whipped an old asthmatic horse in order to get the horse to trot. He caught in the eye a vicious neighbor's dog, who ran alongside the sled which he was driving, and sprang at the horse's head. From experiences such



as these it is obvious that "reverence for life" did not come naturally to Schweitzer but was the consequence of some sort of moral victory.

Of the numerous occasions in which he succumbed to temptation, one occasion was particularly significant. On this particular occasion, Schweitzer, afraid of appearing sentimental, at the age of seven or eight, accepted an invitation to use some toy catapults, which they had made, to shoot at birds. Just as the boys prepared to shoot, the church bells rang out, whereupon Schweitzer shooed the birds away and ran home with the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," deeply driven into his heart. Of this experience, Schweitzer has written:

It was the Warning-bell, which began half an hour before the regular peal-ring, and for me it was a voice from heaven. . . . and ever since then, when the Passiontide bells ring out to the leafless trees and the sunshine, I reflect with a rush of grateful emotion how on that day their music drove deep into my heart the commandment: 'Thou shalt not kill.'

From that day onward I took courage to emancipate myself from the fear of men, and whenever my inner convictions were at stake I let other people's opinions weigh less with me than they had done previously. I tried also to unlearn my former dread of being laughed at by my school-fellows. This early influence upon me of the commandment not to kill or to torture other creatures is the greatest experience of my childhood and youth. By the side of that all others are insignificant.<sup>24</sup>

From this and incidents already cited, the obligation to prevent cruelty and death to all living creation was irresistibly borne in upon him with all the force of a moral law. As this is expressed by Schweitzer,

From experiences like these, which moved my heart and

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<sup>24</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Memoirs of Childhood and Youth, p. 41.



often made me feel ashamed, there slowly grew up in me an unshakeable conviction that we have no right to inflict suffering and death on another living creature unless there is some unavoidable necessity for it, and that we ought all of us to feel what a horrible thing it is to cause suffering and death out of mere thoughtlessness. And this conviction has influenced me only more and more strongly with time.<sup>25</sup>

In regard to the above quotation, Jeschke writes, "Except for the philosophical framework and the more detailed application, this would seem to be reverence for life."<sup>26</sup>

There is another aspect of Schweitzer's ethical sensitivity. This is the question about his right to happiness. About this aspect, Schweitzer has written,

The thought that I had been granted such a specially happy youth was ever in my mind; I felt it even as something oppressive, and ever more clearly there presented itself to me the question whether this happiness was a thing that I might accept as a matter of course. Here, then, was the second great experience of my life, viz. the question about the right to happiness.<sup>27</sup>

This question of the right to happiness did at various times during the course of Schweitzer's youth present itself to him, and, as we can see from the quotation above, it arose out of his sense of gratitude for his own personal lot--to the circumstances into which he was born, to his upbringing, to his education, to the many people who variously assisted him, his aunt and uncle, Dr. Wehman, Widor, the Strasbourg professors, the friendly Captain in his garrison, among so many others.

Connected with this question is the problem of justice. The woes and miseries which prevailed in the world while he, by comparison,

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>26</sup> Jeschke, Reuben P., op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Memoirs of Childhood and Youth, p. 81.



grew up in "absolutely ideal conditions" and was the recipient of so many benefits, caused him many a qualm of conscience. He could never bring himself to accept this happiness as a matter of course; his constant thought was this: "Whoever is spared personal pain must feel himself called to help in diminishing the pain of others." This was "the little cloud" that rose above the horizon of his sunny youth.

This prevailing inequality, he observed, in his youthful idealism, cried for redress, but he noted it encountered only ears that were deaf and eyes that were blind. Through listening to conversations between adults, Schweitzer in his youth came to understand a reason for this and out of this he came to an important resolve of his own. He writes:

I listened, in my youth, to conversations between grown-up people through which there breathed a tone of sorrowful regret which oppressed the heart. The speakers looked back at the idealism and capacity for enthusiasm of their youth as something precious to which they ought to have held fast, and yet at the same time they regarded it as almost a law of nature that no one should be able to do so. This woke in me a dread of having ever, even once, to look back on my own past with such a feeling; I resolved never to let myself become subject to this tragic domination of mere reason, and what I thus vowed in boyish defiance I have tried to carry out.<sup>28</sup>

Through his ability to put himself in another's place and applying the principle of solidarity, Schweitzer did attempt to counteract injustice. This can be seen by his reaction after the wrestling match he had with George Nitschelm. Application of the principle of solidarity did, in Schweitzer's opinion, equally extend itself to the dumb creation.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 98.



As a result of these last two aspects of his moral sensitivity, Schweitzer began "darkly to suspect that ideas were at work within me to the control of which I should one day have to submit."<sup>29</sup> However, upon entering University in the autumn of 1893 these were not, as yet, clear to Schweitzer. That "illumination" came to him on a summer morning at Gunsbach. Because Schweitzer's words are here significant, we quote them at length.

Then one brilliant summer morning at Gunsbach, during the Whitsuntide holidays--it was in 1896--there came to me, as I awoke, the thought that I must not accept this happiness as a matter of course, but must give something in return for it. Proceeding to think the matter out at once with calm deliberation, while the birds were singing outside, I settled with myself before I got up, that I would consider myself justified in living till I was thirty for science and art, in order to devote myself from that time forward to the direct service of humanity. Many a time already had I tried to settle what meaning lay hidden for me in the sayings of Jesus! 'Whosoever would save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the Gospels shall save it.' Now the answer was found. In addition to the outward, I now had inward happiness.<sup>30</sup>

Schweitzer's conclusion that he must not accept his happiness as a matter of course but must give in return something for it reveals the profundity of the personal experience. His decision to devote himself "to the direct service of humanity" was brought about by no outward influence and by no spiritual encounter, as one might expect of a man whose spiritual life developed in a passionate concern with the thought of mankind. Yet, in order that the idea should have force over him and should develop and quicken the force necessary to sustain his life

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>30</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, New York: New American Library, 1953, p. 70.



and make him capable of any achievement and any sacrifice, a seal of personification was necessary. Confirmation was here available from the ultimate authority, Jesus, and from the Apostle Paul. Consequently, those words of Jesus, "He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it," and those words of St. Paul, "To whom much is given of him shall much be required," words, which Schweitzer in his youthful years often pondered, were authoritative summons to action. Thus, what first arose in Schweitzer's moral conscience now took on the force of a commandment. By the words "for my sake" a connection with Jesus is established and a will which sought its own course now embraced one stronger and put it at his service.

At the age of thirty, he carried out his resolve by beginning the study of medicine. When he was thirty-seven, his wife and he set sail for Africa. Somewhat more than two years later he arrived at the moral ideal of "reverence for life."

#### Christianity as a Factor

It can be stated without qualification that to one degree or another the concept of "reverence for life" was conditioned by Schweitzer's Christian background and his understanding of Christian love. His aversion to all killing and inflicting of pain, his eagerness to share his privileges, and his later wish to atone in Africa for the sins of the white man, all reflect in a measure the virtues of the faith in which he had been reared.

Like most Western children, Albert Schweitzer was persuaded to believe Western Christian dogma. By his parents,



community and teachers, he was encouraged to accept faith by faith. As is normal in a parson's home, Albert was taken to divine service very early in his life. While he was not yet old enough to understand, to any extent, the meaning of the service, the occasion, serious and solemn, stirred his spirit and awakened his feelings. In this respect, the actual building in which he worshipped played a decided part.

Toward belief, Schweitzer, at first, stood like most children in a naive and uncritical relation. That, in him, this is so, is evident from his reaction to his weekly recollections of seeing the devil at the church services, when as a child of three or four, he was allowed to regularly attend Sunday services. It was only much later, indeed as a schoolboy, that he came to realize that this remarkable appearance was that of Daddy Iltis, the organist, and that this appearance was created by a mirror which hung near the organ so as to inform the organist when the pastor went to the altar or to the pulpit. Then, too, the biblical stories which were told to him by his parents particularly excited his fantasy. The strongest impression made upon him, however, was the figure of Jesus. There is no doubt that in his childhood his most important and inspiring model has been the person of Jesus. In Jesus, Schweitzer perceived that which he sought to emulate. One can see from reading Schweitzer's autobiography of his childhood and youth how he has striven to resemble Him and practice His ethics, particularly that of the Sermon on the Mount.

Doubt of this naive, uncritical faith came to him in his eighth year and indicated a predestination to scholarly research into the life of Jesus. Asserting itself in him was that spirit of



Enlightenment which reigned in the paternal home. Just as we have seen that Schweitzer rejects the attempts to explain the natural phenomena that in reality are inexplicable, Schweitzer rejected the apparent logic of portions of the New Testament, a book which he requested and received from his father and which he thereafter zealously studied. Because his experience with the New Testament gives us an insight into Schweitzer's later method of scientific investigation, critical acumen, an unacademic ability of common sense, a simplicity of thought which is thoroughly radical and seeks the truth unconditionally and without qualification, the record of his thoughts on the occasion are here quoted.

Among the stories which interested me most was that of the Three Wise Men from the East. What did the parents of Jesus do, I asked myself, with the gold and other valuables which they got from these men? How could they have been poor after that? And that the Wise Men should never have troubled themselves again about the Child Jesus is to me incomprehensible. The absence, too, of any record of the shepherds of Bethlehem becoming disciples, gave me a severe shock.<sup>31</sup>

By his fourteenth year, Schweitzer was convinced that humanity was given understanding in order to discover the truth and also to apprehend the faith. Hence, he was not at one with the pastor who confirmed him. Pastor Wennagel hoped to impress upon his students that in questions of faith all reasoning must be silenced. Schweitzer quietly rejected this. He writes:

But I was convinced--and I am so still--that the fundamental principles of Christianity have to be proved true by reasoning, and by no other method. Reason, I said to myself, is given us that we

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<sup>31</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Memoirs of Childhood and Youth, p. 28.



may bring everything within the range of its action, even the most exalted ideas of religion. And this certainty filled me with joy.<sup>32</sup>

With this attitude, Wennagel held him to be one of the indifferent ones, whereas Schweitzer recalls that he was so moved by the holiness of the time that he felt almost ill. This passion to seek the truth through logical thinking became so urgent in him that during the next two years he made himself a thorough nuisance to everybody, especially to his father, through his disputatiousness.

In 1893, Schweitzer entered the University of Strasbourg, where he chose to study philosophy and theology concurrently. From the beginning of his university studies, Schweitzer was an eager and conscientious student. The subject which especially fascinated him was the study of the synoptic Gospels. In this he had the benefit of instruction from Henrich Julius Holtzman, a leading exponent of the liberal school of research into the life of Jesus and recognized among scholars for his Marcan hypothesis. Thus, when Schweitzer had to serve a year of military service, he did not let this interfere with his studies, and when he went on maneuvers, he carried with him his Greek Testament which in the evenings and on rest days he carefully studied.

On a rest day spent in the Alsatian village of Guggenheim in 1894, Schweitzer, after concentrating on the tenth and eleventh chapters of Matthew, came to an important intellectual discovery and the key to the "eschatological interpretation." From his concentrated

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 60.



study, Schweitzer concluded that Holtzman's theory that Mark was the oldest Gospel and served as a source of Matthew could not be substantiated since the tenth and eleventh chapters of Matthew contained discourse which was peculiar to Matthew alone. For Schweitzer, Holtzman's explanation of these two chapters was not satisfactory, for, he reasoned, "A later generation would never have gone so far as to put into His mouth words which were belied by the subsequent course of events."<sup>33</sup> From this discovery, Schweitzer formed his famous hypothesis that the career of Jesus could be interpreted, on the basis of the historical evidence, only as completely conditioned by the eschatological expectation of the Jews of His time; that is, by a belief in the imminence of a total change in the natural world to be inaugurated by the advent of the Messiah. Thereafter, Schweitzer began to occupy himself with independent research into the problems connected with the historical life of Jesus.

This private investigation was given a welcome impetus at the end of his fourth year when the subject set for his preliminary thesis in theology was "Schleiermacher's teaching about the Last Supper compared with conceptions of it embodied in the New Testament and the Confessions of faith drawn up by the Reformers." As a result of this piece of work, Schweitzer became more convinced his original hypothesis was tenable. As a consequence, too, of this piece of work, his outlook and interest were widened to include the larger problem of primitive Christianity.

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<sup>33</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 11.



Upon completing his doctorate in philosophy in 1899, Schweitzer turned once again to theological research. In the next few years, he produced six<sup>34</sup> major works of a religious-historical nature: Das Abendmahlsproblem auf Grund der Wissenschaftlichen Forschung des 19 Jahrhunderts und der Historischen Berichte, published in 1900, Das Messianitäts- und Leidensgeheimnis. Eine Skizze des Lebens Jesu, published in 1901, Von Reimarus zu Wrede. Eine Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung, published in 1906,<sup>35</sup> Geschichte der paulinischen Forschungen von der Reformation bis auf die Gegenwart, published in 1911, Die Psychiatrische Beurteilung Jesu, published in 1913, and Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus, published in 1930.<sup>36</sup> These works center around two great themes which Schweitzer took as the subject of his theological investigations: Jesus and Paul. His basic theological theme was research into the life of Jesus. However, theological as well as historical considerations led him into undertaking the second of these themes.

Let us now turn to the first of these themes, which, as we have seen, has occupied Schweitzer's thought from his early childhood.

<sup>34</sup> A further work, The History of the Last Supper and Baptism in the Early Christian Period, was also completed and delivered in lectures; however, in spite of his good intentions in completing this work for publication, this work was never published.

<sup>35</sup> This work was revised and re-edited in 1913 under the title, Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung.

<sup>36</sup> While this work was not completed until 1930, Schweitzer claims the work was near completion in 1911.



With his eschatological hypothesis as a solution to the riddles of the life of Jesus, Schweitzer presented Jesus after a "thoroughgoing eschatological" pattern for, in Schweitzer's opinion, "Jesus, however, must have thought either eschatologically or uneschatologically, but not both together--nor in such a wise that the eschatological was superadded to supplement the uneschatological."<sup>37</sup> His conclusions were strikingly different from both the liberal Jesus of the late nineteenth century and the Christ who "had been riveted for centuries to the stony rocks of ecclesiastical doctrine."<sup>38</sup>

Schweitzer's interpretation of the life of Jesus is indeed unorthodox. According to his interpretation of the public ministry of Jesus, which at the most lasted less than a year, Jesus, a product of the eschatology and the apocalyptic thought of late Judaism, believed upon His baptism, where the secret of His existence was revealed to Him, that He was to be the future Messiah. He was, however, not yet the Messiah, but would be manifested as such with the coming of the Kingdom of God, an imminent and cataclysmic event. This was Jesus' secret. The common people, however, recognized Him as a prophet, or, in their highest estimate, from His appearance and proclamation, as Elijah. As the unrecognized Messiah, Jesus had, in the meantime, to labor for the Kingdom. As well as proclaiming the approaching advent of the Kingdom of God, Jesus preached

<sup>37</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Mystery of the Kingdom of God, p. vii.

<sup>38</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Quest of the Historical Jesus, p. 397.



repentance and proclaimed a code of ethics which was absolutely essential for those who wished to be counted among the Just before God's Judgment Seat, a kind of "interim ethics," the main points of which were contained in the Sermon on the Mount.

After a few weeks of preaching, Jesus, believing the Kingdom was at hand, sent forth His disciples to proclaim throughout the cities of Israel the nearness of the Kingdom. Before they had returned Jesus expected that the Kingdom of God would be ushered in and that He would be manifested as the Messiah.

However, the disciples returned but the Kingdom of God had not, as He had expected, come. Since the unprecedented tribulations for mankind, out of which shall issue the Parousia, had not come to pass, He concluded that it would have to be brought about in order that the Kingdom of God may be constrained to come. Therefore, Jesus, whose Messianic consciousness was never without the thought of the Passion, settled that He, the future Messiah, must humble Himself and serve His suffering in ransom for the sins of those who were ordained for the Kingdom, consequently, sparing them from the Great Tribulation. The Baptist's death showed Him in what form He was to suffer: He would be put to death as a malefactor in the sight of the people.

In order to carry out this perfect atonement, Jesus with His disciples, who on the mountain near Bethsaida and again at Caesarea Philippi had become aware of His secret, journeyed to Jerusalem for the time of the Passover pilgrimage. At the last meal which He took with His disciples, He consecrated them to be His companions at the



coming Messianic meal. Here in Jerusalem, Judas Iscariot betrayed Him, not as commonly supposed by revealing his whereabouts for an arrest, but revealing His secret. This was all the Sanhedrin, who found Jesus a most dangerous threat to his authority, needed to bring a substantial charge against Him, and He was subsequently arrested. Now, since Judas was to be the sole witness at the trial and according to Jewish law at least two were required before sentence could be pronounced, unless Jesus admitted to the charge, the charge was useless. Jesus, however, admitted to the charge, even strengthening it by telling his Judges that they will see Him as the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God and coming on the cloud of heaven. Consequently, he was condemned to death. His outcry, "Why hast thou forsaken Me?" reveals the horror and the whole darkness of His Passion and His last sigh, "Into thy hands I commend My spirit," reveals His superhuman splendor. Later, when the disciples found the empty grave, in their enthusiastic expectation, they had visions of Him as risen from the grave, with God in heaven soon to appear as the Messiah and bring in the Kingdom.

In one of his finest passages of imaginative writing, Schweitzer summarized his description of the public ministry of Jesus.

There is silence all around. The Baptist appears, and cries: 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.' Soon after that comes Jesus, and in the knowledge that He is the coming Son of Man lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on the last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and He throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn; and crushes Him. Instead of bringing in the eschatological conditions, He has destroyed them. The wheel rolls onward, and the mangled body of the one immeasurably great Man, who was strong enough to think of Himself as the spiritual ruler of mankind and to bend history to His purpose is hanging upon it still. That is His



victory and His reign.<sup>39</sup>

When Schweitzer seemed to have discovered the historical Jesus, he found that He was more than ever an "unknown": "He does not stay; He passes by our time and returns to His own... by the same inevitable necessity by which the liberated pendulum returns to its original position."<sup>40</sup> Neither knowledge nor wisdom can provide the key to His Person, but only the act of surrender. As Schweitzer writes in the conclusion of his The Mystery of the Kingdom of God, moving in its devotion,

Before that mysterious Person, who, in the form of his time, knew that He was creating upon the foundation of His life and death a moral world which bears His name, we must be forced to lay our faces in the dust, without daring even to wish to understand His nature.<sup>41</sup>

And again, as he writes in his famous but obscure last paragraph of The Quest of the Historical Jesus,

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow thou Me!' and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their experience Who He is.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Quest of the Historical Jesus, pp. 368-369.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 397.

<sup>41</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Mystery of the Kingdom of God: the Secret of Jesus' Messiahship and Passion. New York: Macmillan, 1950, p. 247.

<sup>42</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Quest of the Historical Jesus, p. 401.



For Schweitzer, this Jesus is incomparably heroic. He is superhuman. His outstanding achievement is having been able, by virtue of His natural and profoundly ethical qualities, to absorb the late Jewish eschatology and thus give expression to the hopes and desires of an ethical consummation of the world in a way that corresponded with the ideas of His time. He can not, however, be an authority for us on matters of knowledge; His authority lies in the sphere of the will. His purpose can only be seen in the fact that He is able by virtue of His powerful spirit to raise our motives, desires and hopes to a height and clarity which would be impossible were we dependent on ourselves alone and not influenced by His personality. In that, He thus brings the general character of our world-view into harmony with His in spite of the apparent diversity of ideas between them, and what is more, awakens the energies in us which are effective in Him.

This Jesus is not a figure who was once with us and is now no more. We can see him immediately, now. This Jesus can be found, but only when He is experienced as spiritually risen in man.

In his Out of My Life and Thought, Schweitzer again reviews much of his thought about Jesus, giving now special attention to what the historical Jesus can be to us. Again, he insists that Jesus' thought, speech and action was determined by His expectation of the end of the world and of a Kingdom of God which would be manifested supernaturally. The fact that the Jesus of Schweitzer is One who could be mistaken about historical events does not lessen his ethical contribution. Through a system of thought that rejected the world, Jesus



managed to set up the ethic of active love, however, "We cannot make it our own through the concepts in which He proclaimed it but must rather translate it into those of our modern view of the world."<sup>43</sup> The challenge is not "to grasp either in speech or in thought Who He is,"<sup>44</sup> but to follow Him.

The true understanding of Jesus is the understanding of will acting on will. The true relation to Him is to be taken possession of by Him. Christian piety of any and every sort is valuable only so far as it means the surrender of our will to His.<sup>45</sup>

In this manner only is the religion of Jesus at liberty to become a living force over thought everywhere.

Because earlier investigations had raised doubts about the question of Jesus' sanity and because Schweitzer felt his eschatological Jesus might be construed as to lend support and comfort to such a contention, Schweitzer felt somewhat obliged to undertake a thorough psychiatric study of Jesus. However loathe he was to subject Jesus to a psychiatric examination, he comforted himself, as he did while undertaking his earlier studies of Jesus, with the thought that "reverence for truth must be exalted above everything else."<sup>46</sup> The conclusion of his study, his dissertation for the medical doctorate, The Psychiatric Study of Jesus, was that on the basis of the material that was utilized by the critics, for the most part unhistorical, no

<sup>43</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 46.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>46</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Psychiatric Study of Jesus: Exposition and Criticism: Boston: the Beacon Press, 1962, p. 9.



ground could be found for assuming any abnormality.

The second theme of Schweitzer's religious-historical investigations, Paul, arose out of his earlier studies of Jesus. Our intention is now offering in summary Schweitzer's interpretation of Pauline mysticism, is, as it was Schweitzer's, to show the development that took place immediately upon the death of the eschatological Jesus. For Schweitzer, the history of dogma does not begin at the point where the undisputed and general Hellenisation of Christianity sets in but immediately upon the death of Jesus. Paulinism stands as an integral part of the history of dogma and St. Paul occupies a key position in the transition from Jesus to the early Greek theology. To establish this connection, Schweitzer offers an explanation of St. Paul's position.

Again, his conclusions are unorthodox. According to Schweitzer, the thought world of St. Paul can be understood only through late Judaism; that is, through the ideas of eschatology. The unique Pauline mysticism arose out of a historic situation. On the death of Jesus, the predicted eschatological event did not transpire. Paul lived, as did all in the first communities, in the expectation of an early return of Christ and the beginning of a new world era. However, Paul, a logical thinker of "elemental" power, had to reckon with the facts wholly unforeseen in Jewish eschatology, namely that the Messiah had appeared as a man, had died and is risen.

In Paul's view, Jesus' resurrection was no isolated event but the beginning of the Resurrection Period. By this is meant that the world is already in transformation although the change in the



natural world to the supernatural world brought about by the resurrection powers had not, as yet, become manifest. History, Paul saw as a series of volcanic upheavals.

Paul knows that the immortal world is about to rise by successive volcanic upheavals out of the ocean of the temporal. In the Resurrection of Jesus (the first-fruit of them that have fallen asleep) one island peak has already become visible. But this is only a part of a larger island which, still beneath the waves, is actually in the process of rising, and is only so far covered as to be just invisible. The larger island is the corporiety of the elect who are united with Christ. In their transformation and anticipatory resurrection the further portion of the immortal world will forthwith appear. Thereafter, in temporally separated upheavals, one portion of land after another will rise about the island. In this Messianic period all Nature will take on immortal being. And then, as the final event of the renewing of the world, at the end of the Messianic Kingdom, will come the general resurrection of the dead. With that the whole continent of the immortal world will have become visible. Then comes the end, when all things are eternal in God, and God is all in all.<sup>47</sup>

The faithful are one in body and one in spirit with the resurrected Christ; they are, in fact, in Christ. Baptism and the Lord's Supper, already established and accredited in Judaism, Paul took over and brought into relation with the mysticism of "being-in-Christ."

Paul's system is not a perversion of Jesus' Gospel. He shared with Jesus the eschatological world-view and the eschatological expectation, with all that these imply. Paul's independent position is the difference in the "hour of the world clock" as a result of the death and resurrection of Jesus. However, Paul's unique mystical doctrine of union with Christ, and his sacramental doctrine, provided a form

<sup>47</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle, New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1933, p. 112.



in which the faith of the Primitive Church was susceptible to being Hellenised. This Hellenisation of Christianity took place unobserved and without coming into conflict with the eschatological expectation. The latter "surrounded it like an outer integument which was later to drop away." This transition was begun by Ignatius and Justin, then to the Fourth Gospel, and so to the Fathers of the Alexandrian Church.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to say unequivocally the place Jesus and Paul may have occupied in the direction of his "reverence for life." With respect to Paul, it would seem not at all, and he gives no indication of having found clues to "reverence for life" here. Schweitzer's admiration of Paul rests on other grounds.

Schweitzer's admiration of St. Paul is twofold. As a thinker, Paul demonstrates great originality, consistency and depth of thought. Paul's courage in translating the thought-forms of primitive Christian belief into those which were proper to the world-view of his own times has not only championed the rights of thought in Christianity for all times but has given Christianity direction. And, too, by grasping as the thing essential to being a Christian, the idea of union with God, he has pointed out the path that Christianity ought to follow. In still another way Paul has given direction to Christianity. By connecting the expectation of the Kingdom and of the redemption to be realized in it, with the coming and the death of Jesus in such a way that belief in redemption which is realizing itself in the present, and in the coming of the Kingdom, Paul has freed it from the temporal limitations and it is valid for all times. As a man, then, Paul demonstrates a consecration to lofty goals. Schweitzer's thoughts



about Paul's achievement as a man are the most eloquent and moving passages in his The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle.

Side by side with Paul's achievement as a thinker must be set his achievement as a man. Having a personality at once simple and profound, he avoids an abstract and unnatural ideal of perfection, and makes perfection consist in the complete adjustment of spiritual with natural reality. So long as the earthly world with all its circumstances still subsists, what we have to do is to live in it in the spirit of unworldliness that truth and peace already make their influence felt in it. That is the ideal of Paul's ethic, to live with the eyes fixed upon eternity, while standing firmly on the solid ground of reality. . . .

He proves the truth of his ethic by his way of living it. Alike in suffering and in action he shows himself a human being, who by the Spirit of Christ has been purified and led up to a higher humanity. . . .

As one who truly thought, served, worked, and ruled in the Spirit of Christ he has earned the right to say to the men of all periods: 'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.'<sup>48</sup>

With respect to Jesus, who according to New Testament accounts did practise reverence for life in a qualified sense, we cannot say what role He might have played in the emergence of Schweitzer's "reverence for life." Estimates vary remarkably from those who see practically all of Schweitzer's motivation in the influence of Jesus<sup>49</sup> to those who feel that his mature thought largely discards any essential necessity for Jesus.<sup>50</sup> Each can find some evidence to

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 333.

<sup>49</sup> Hagedorn, Herman, Prophet in the Wilderness: the Story of Albert Schweitzer: New York, Macmillan, 1958.

<sup>50</sup> Kraus, Oskar, Albert Schweitzer: His Work and His Philosophy, London: A. and C. Black, 1944; and Murray, John Middleton, Love, Freedom and Society, London: Cape, 1957.



support his point of view. Nevertheless, even the latter are disposed to admit that Jesus has been important to his ethical development and motivation. Regardless, without the Christian factor which from his early boyhood became an increasingly more powerful influence in his existence, it is doubtful whether Schweitzer would have been led to his discovery of "reverence for life."

While Schweitzer may not have found any clues to "reverence for life" in his religious-historical investigations into the life of Jesus, and he gives no indication of having found any, Schweitzer, not unlike other followers of Jesus, sought to imitate him literally. There can be no doubt that the heroic figure of Jesus led him to service and sacrifice and His example was Schweitzer's great model. Just as Jesus gave up preaching during His most successful period, Schweitzer abandoned a brilliant career in science, music and letters in order to embark on a splendid, yet perilous, adventure of Christian discipleship. While the role religion has played in his decision to practice medicine in French Equatorial Africa has been strongly de-emphasized by some writers,<sup>51</sup> we know this is not the case for we have Schweitzer's own testimony in the matter. In a letter to Gustav von Lupke, Schweitzer has explained the reason for his decision, and because his words are significant we quote them at considerable length.

I hope you will give me the pleasure of showing a deeper insight than most people... and that you will find the course I am taking as natural and right as I do myself. For me the whole essence of religion is at stake. For me religion means to be

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<sup>51</sup> Clark, Henry, op. cit., p. 77.



human, plainly human in the sense in which Jesus was. In the colonies things are pretty hopeless and comfortless. We--the Christian nations--send out there the mere dregs of our people; we think only of what we can get out of the natives...in short what is happening there is a mockery of humanity and Christianity. If this wrong is in some measure to be atoned for, we must send out there men who will do good in the name of Jesus, not simply proselytising missionaries, but men who will help the distressed as they must be helped if the sermon on the Mount and the words of Jesus are valid and right.

Now we set there and study theology, and then compete for the best ecclesiastical positions, write thick learned books in order to become professors of theology...and what is going on out there where the honour and the name of Jesus are at stake, does not concern us at all. And I am supposed to devote my life to making ever fresh critical discoveries, that I might become famous as a theologian, and go on training pastors who will also set at home, and will not have the right to send them out to this vital work. I cannot do so. For years I have turned these matters over in my mind, this way and that. At last it became clear to me that the meaning of my life does not consist in knowledge or art but simply in being human and doing some little thing in the spirit of Jesus... 'What you have done to the least of these my brethren you have done to me.' Just as the wind is driven to spend its force in the big empty spaces so must the men who know the laws of the spirit go where men are more needed.<sup>52</sup>

And in another letter, Schweitzer writes,

The holy music of religion sounds softly but clearly! I am very reticent (probably too much so) about my religious feeling. But everything is in the conclusion to the Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung: Jesus the Lord! Peace in Christ! Jesus has simply taken me prisoner since my childhood. ... My going to Africa was an act of obedience to Jesus.<sup>53</sup>

Then, in his On the Edge of the Primeval Forest there is a stirring account of a surgical operation unmistakably representing his going to

<sup>52</sup> Pierhal, Jean, Albert Schweitzer: The Story of His Life, New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1956, p. 59.

<sup>53</sup> Deutsches Pfarrblatt, XXXV, December 30, 1931, p. 824.



Africa as an act of obedience to Jesus. He writes:

The operation is finished and in the hardly lighted dormitory I watch for the sick man's awakening. Scarcely has he recovered consciousness when he stares about him and ejaculates again and again: 'I have no more pain! I have no more pain!' His hands feel for mine and will not let it go. Then I begin to tell him and the others who are in the room that it is the Lord Jesus who has told the doctor... to come to the Ogowe.<sup>54</sup>

In yet another way Schweitzer emulated his great model, Jesus. Like Schweitzer's Jesus, whose self-sacrifice of His life is equivalent to an atonement for the sins of mankind, the life of self-sacrifice which Schweitzer decided to lead amounts also to the work of atonement and in his book On the Edge of the Primeval Forest he represents it as such, explaining his decision to come to Africa as a response to the parable of Lazarus and Dives. In the same book, there is an account of a surgical operation undeniably representing his going to Africa as an act of obedience to Jesus.

A heavy guilt rests upon our civilization. What have not the whites of all nations since the era of discovery done to the coloured people! What does it signify that so many people where Christianity came have died out and others are vanishing or at least disintegrating? Who can describe the injustices and atrocities committed? Who can estimate what alcohol and awful diseases we have transmitted have done to them? If history told all that has happened between whites and blacks, many pages would be turned without being read. A heavy guilt rests upon us. We must serve them. When we do good to them it is not benevolence--it is atonement.<sup>55</sup>

In his practical example of following the example of Jesus,

<sup>54</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, On the Edge of the Primeval Forest, London: A. and C. Black, 1922, p. 93.

<sup>55</sup> Roback, A. A. (ed.), The Albert Schweitzer Jubilee Book, Cambridge: Sci-Art Publishers, 1945, p. 91.



to such an extent has Schweitzer identified himself with Jesus that Kraus writes, "Schweitzer's portrayal of Jesus constitutes an appendix to a pen-portrait of Schweitzer himself."<sup>56</sup>

In 1915, Schweitzer discovered "reverence for life." With reference to Jesus, his later writings carry somewhat different overtones. The reason for this must at least partly lie in his discovery of "reverence for life." By now, "reverence for life" had become his maxim.

These overtones are particularly evident in Christianity and the Religions of the World and Out of My Life and Thought. In Christianity and the Religions of the World, the topic of lectures delivered in 1922, Schweitzer claims Christianity tries neither to explain the world nor withdraw from it. Its dualisms unresolved, it holds to active ethical affirmation of the world. Toward this finding by Christianity of itself, the Renaissance helped. Laid aside were such negative aspects of denial as it had previously, and hence it turned more fully to world- and life-affirmation. Because of the domination of the affirmative stress, Christianity became a power to civilization. Christianity, Schweitzer concludes, is "the most profound religion" and, at the same time, "the most profound philosophy."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Kraus, Oskar, Albert Schweitzer: His Work and His Philosophy, London: A. and C. Black, 1944, p. 57.

<sup>57</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Christianity and the Religions of the World, London: A. and C. Black, Ltd., 1923, p. 30f.



In Schweitzer's eyes, by now, the original ethic of Jesus and his "reverence for life" are very much the same. In Out of My Life and Thought he writes, "The ethic of Reverence for Life is the ethic of Love widened into universality. It is the ethic of Jesus, now recognized as a logical consequence of thought."<sup>58</sup> And again, "The ethic of Reverence for Life is the ethic of Jesus brought to philosophical expression, extended into cosmical form and conceived of as intellectual necessity."<sup>59</sup>

In all this, it is apparent what Schweitzer has done. After arriving at "reverence for life," he saw in Christianity an ethical mysticism, a life-affirming stress, and a necessity of seeing love as elemental thought, consequently he attempted to establish an identity between the two. When we read, "The essence of Christianity is an affirmation of the world that has passed through a rejection of the world. Within a system of thought that rejects the world and anticipates its end, Jesus sets up the ethic of active love."<sup>60</sup> we can only conclude that by now Jesus has been remodelled to fit the demands of "reverence for life."

In conclusion, it is felt that while Schweitzer's "reverence for life" was conditioned by Christianity, it played an indeterminate part in the emergence of this philosophy. It would appear, in fact, that more interpretation and influence travelled from the latter to the

<sup>58</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 180.

<sup>59</sup> Seaver, George, Albert Schweitzer: The Man and His Mind, New York: Harper and Bros., 1947, p. 285.

<sup>60</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 48.



former than from the former to the latter.

### The Philosophy of Kant as a Factor

Having on May 6, 1898, passed his first theological examination, Schweitzer, before turning to the preparation of his Licentiate and thus to theological research, decided to pursue his study of philosophy more diligently. It was on Zeigler's suggestion that Schweitzer chose philosophy for his doctoral thesis and again it was on Zeigler's suggestion that Schweitzer chose the religious philosophy of Kant as the subject of his dissertation. Zeigler's suggestion on both accounts was not as casual as extraneous circumstances of its giving would suggest. In view of Zeigler's own background in theology and his interest in ethics and the philosophy of religion, this choice of theme was a compliment to Schweitzer, and further, it also indicated that Zeigler understood Schweitzer's spiritual position lie on the dividing line between the philosophical and theological faculties.<sup>61</sup>

In the spring of 1899, he completed his doctoral dissertation and before the end of the year, it appeared in print under the title Die Religionsphilosophie Kants. In this work, Schweitzer seeks to show that religious conclusions assumed by Kant to follow from certain

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<sup>61</sup> Henry Clark in The Philosophy of Albert Schweitzer, (p. 22), writes: "Schweitzer came under Kant's sway indirectly through Neo-Kantianism's impact upon late nineteenth-century German theology. It was Neo-Kantianism which employed morality as the crucial ingredient in the Christian life, and, consciously or unconsciously, Albert Schweitzer became a representative of this school of thought."



philosophical presuppositions are at times quite irreconcilable with these, nor do they follow logically. He explores Kant's major works and traces the development of his views as they matured showing how at various stages of his philosophical career he conceived particular problems.<sup>62</sup> Schweitzer's conclusion is that Kant does not prove his case for religion and that he has not constructed an adequate religious outlook on the basis of the critical idealism from which he proceeds. The result is not a unity. Basic ideas, as for instance those of God and freedom, are changed even while they are undergoing treatment and words are varyingly employed in different contexts, resulting in outright contradictions or the ignoring in later works of the results which seemed to have been established in previous works. For Schweitzer, Kant goes farther in the erection of his postulates than the results of his critical idealism really allow, and as a consequence, he cannot follow his course through because of its dependence upon a certain theory of knowledge.

Schweitzer's work on Kant is reviewed by Schweitzer in his Out of My Life and Thought. Here he calls attention to the fluctuation in Kant's use of the words "intelligible" and "supersensible." This ambiguity which appears in Kant's work, when traced, indicated to Schweitzer that Kant's philosophy "is in a state of constant flux."<sup>62</sup> Schweitzer writes, "This must be referred to the fact that the presuppositions of his critical idealism and the religio-historical claims

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<sup>62</sup> Athenaeum, I., January 22, 1901, p. 781.



of the moral law stand in antagonism to each other. Kant gives us side by side a critical religious philosophy and an ethical, which he seeks to reconcile and to work into a unity.<sup>63</sup> Kant would harmonize them, but he cannot be successful because he progressively intensified the idea of the moral law as presupposed by the transcendental dialectic of the Critique of Pure Reason, consequently losing interest in the further support that it demands. Thus, he is able to remain consistent at this point.

Schweitzer's conclusions on Kant are definite. While Schweitzer considered him the greatest of the German philosophers,<sup>64</sup> nevertheless, he considered Kant to be unsuccessful in his general intention of establishing the autonomy and absoluteness of the moral law on postulates that are a necessity of thought, of making ethical duty universally binding on man and holding to his ethical freedom, and as a result, he failed to deepen the "naive idealistic conception of the ethical"<sup>65</sup> thus initiating the downfall of the naive optimistic-ethical world-view of the eighteenth century. While Schweitzer does

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<sup>63</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 21.

<sup>64</sup> This judgment certainly does not coincide with the conclusion of his doctoral dissertation, still less with Schweitzer's views expressed in his Civilization and Ethics where he writes, (p. 108): "Kant, then, does not essay the task of developing an ethic which corresponds to his deepened conception of the ethical. On the whole, he does nothing more than put the current utilitarian ethic under the Protectorate of a Categorical Imperative. Behind a magnificent facade he constructs a block of tenements." And again, (p. 114), "Thus, we find in Kant's philosophy the most terrible want of thought interwoven with the deepest thinking."

<sup>65</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, London: Adam and Charles Black, 1949, p. 113.



credit Kant with an awareness that ethics must spring from an "inward compulsion" which was a progressive step, and the fact that he has even rendered a service to ethics by his "challenge to profounder reflection on the nature of the ethical and the ethical duty of man,"<sup>66</sup> this "profundity is gained at the cost of vitality,"<sup>67</sup> and herein lie Schweitzer's two major complaints against Kant. First, Kant fails to give his ethics a definite content, by-passing this task in order to connect it with "an idealistic representation of the world which has its source in a theory of knowledge."<sup>68</sup> Then, while asserting an absolute ideal, he does not give it universal application for its content, in fact, he excludes non-human creatures altogether. Second, Kant fails to establish his ethic with a sufficiently compelling character because he side-tracks it with epistemology, rather than grounding it in what life gives to thought as its demands.

In spite of this, there is a fundamental spiritual affinity between them. The strong appeal of Kant's thought to Schweitzer is two-fold: it represents the recoil of a deeply religious spirit from the vague, emotional inclinations of pietism on the one hand and from the imperious dogmas of scholasticism on the other, both of which, for Schweitzer, are enemies of any true religious faith; and it is the product of that optimistic-ethical world-view which Schweitzer admires, but one which looks beyond that to something more profound,

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 109.



convinced that ethics must be founded on rational thought. In Schweitzer's opinion, Kant "is the first since Plato to feel, like him, that the ethical is the mysterious fact within us. . . . that ethics are a volition which raises us above ourselves, makes us free from the natural order of the world, and attaches us to a higher world-order."<sup>69</sup> This is Kant's "great discovery."

As to the question of how much Kant contributed to the discovery of the ethical ideal of "reverence for life," we cannot say. Estimates vary considerably. Some freely admit the strong influence of Kant; others are more cautious. None, however, deny that Schweitzer was influenced by him. While we cannot trace any direct transmission of Kant's thought to Schweitzer's "reverence for life," Schweitzer's own thought, when this is later formulated, reflects a harmony of spirit and of general purpose to that of Kant for those concerns of Kant were, to a large extent, those also of Albert Schweitzer. George Seaver, who attempted to assess the influence of Kant on Schweitzer's life and thought, concludes,

Nevertheless, there is no philosopher ancient or modern with whose central thought the mind of Schweitzer can be more akin, or feel in closer sympathy. Inherent in all his thought is the philosopher's insistence upon the primacy of the practical over the theoretical reason; the autonomy and integrity of the Good Will which is inviolable against any failure or miscarriage in its results; his vindication of the truth that obedience and no sort of doctrinal shibboleths whatsoever--metaphysical or theological--is the organ of spiritual understanding; that the moral law is categorically binding and also absolutely free; that obligation to obey it implies ability, and with it the compulsion of an inner necessity: 'I ought, therefore I can. . . . I ought to make my

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 106.



actions in the phenomenal world conform to the autonomy of the Timeless Will.<sup>70</sup>

### Other Possible Factors

While, perhaps, we could attempt to identify other factors ad infinitum which might in some measure have played a part in the emergence of Schweitzer's "reverence for life," we shall concern ourselves here solely with the more obvious, namely those about which Schweitzer in his various works did devote some attention. Here, then, we deal with Goethe, Bach, Indian thought and Western Philosophers.

Schweitzer, whose acquaintance with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe can be traced back at least to his preparatory school days, was deeply influenced by the author. The practical-industrial side of Goethe's life, his social concern, his progressive spirit, his splendid illustration of individualism, all contributed something more or less to Schweitzer's own life. Schweitzer's debt to Goethe has been acknowledged in various addresses: "Goethe Prize Address," August 28, 1928, "Memorial Address," March 15, 1932, "Goethe and the Philosophy of his Day," April 15, 1932, "Goethe as Thinker and Man," July 9, 1932, and "Goethe: His Personality and His Work," July 6, 1949.

The contribution of Goethe toward Schweitzer's "reverence for life" is open to question. It is interesting to note that Goethe's

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<sup>70</sup> Seaver, George, The Man and His Mind, p. 118.



Wilhelm Meister acknowledges "reverence" and there can be no doubt that Schweitzer was familiar with this work. In Wilhelm Meister, the Three, who represent the Chief, explain to Wilhelm the threefold reverence for that which is around, and reverence for that which is below. They are actually three different degrees of religion. However, Schweitzer disclaims that "reverence for life" came from this source. He writes:

As for the idea of reverence for life, I think I am right in saying that he had no part in the genesis of the idea or of the words. . . . The idea of reverence for life came to me as an unexpected discovery, like an illumination coming upon me in the midst of intense thought while I was completely conscious.<sup>71</sup>

This does not, however, preclude possible unconscious influences.

As for Johann Sebastian Bach, Schweitzer's acquaintance with him goes back to his early childhood, and Bach certainly figured prominently in Schweitzer's life. Schweitzer's admiration of the man rests on aesthetic grounds, a common religious spirit and on the personal greatness of the man. However, Bach does not seem to have influenced Schweitzer in the direction of "reverence for life."

Since to one degree or another four volumes of Schweitzer's works touch upon Indian religion and mysticism one needs to ask whether a formative influence is to be found at this point. In Christianity and the Religions Schweitzer deals individually with Brahmanism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. He characterizes the first two together as

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<sup>71</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Goethe: Four Studies, Boston: The Beacon Press, 1949, p. 27.



possessing an ethic of words. Hinduism is said to have been a reaction against the ethical pessimism of Brahmanism and Buddhism, but to be yet not ethically valid.

His two volumes about civilization carry a number of references, but none which would indicate any particular influence from Indian religion. While he credits it with always having been more able to deal with spiritual and ethical efforts than with material things, he feels that now, too, its thought is losing power. He commends its search for the meaning of life, however, its pessimistic and "world-and life-denying" character does not appeal to him. The only evidence we have that comes close to an acknowledgment of influence is in a word of admiration.

And yet, all the same, we cannot feel ourselves completely justified in the face of these strange Eastern theories. They have in them something full of nobility which retains its hold on us, even fascinates us. This tinge of nobility comes from the fact that these convictions are born of a search for a theory of the universe and for the meaning of life. With us, on the other hand, activist instincts and impulses take the place of a theory of the universe. We have no theory of these thinkers, no thought which has found a basis for an optimistic conception of existence to oppose to this other, which has arrived at a pessimistic conception.<sup>72</sup>

Schweitzer once more deals with the thought of India in his book Indian Thought and its Development, a book published twenty-one years after the announcement of "reverence for life" itself and intended as part of the preparation for a third volume of his philosophy of civilization. Again, we find no clues as to any early influences from this source.

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<sup>72</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Decay and Restoration of Civilization, p. 99.



His motive in undertaking this investigation, which served to confirm the views that by now he has already long held was to focus attention on the inadequacy of Indian thought, as he had earlier demonstrated the inadequacy of European thought, and by showing how they supplement each other, to stimulate a common basis for a new world civilization. Such a need is expressed in the preface of Indian Thought and its Development.

For there must indeed arrive a philosophy profounder and more living than our own and endowed with great spiritual and ethical force. In this terrible period through which mankind is passing, from the East and from the West we must all keep a look-out for the coming of this more perfect and more powerful form of thought which will conquer the hearts of individuals and compel whole peoples to acknowledge its sway. It is for this that we must strive.<sup>73</sup>

As Schweitzer interprets the development of Indian thought, from magical mysticism Indian thought perceived the perception that world-view is mysticism, that is, the spiritual union of man with Infinite Being, but from magical mysticism it also derived world- and life-negation. This mystical world-view, in the hands of the Brahmins, "dropped out of the natural key of world and life-affirmation into the unnatural key of world and life negation."<sup>74</sup> Thus the development of Indian thought is seen as a secret struggle between world- and life-affirmation and world- and life-negation with its principles of non-activity.

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<sup>73</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Indian Thought and its Development, p. x.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 250.



The issue is ethics. Even the early Brahmins find it impossible to be consistent about so unnatural a world-view and they concede to world- and life-affirmation that action in conformity with the duties of caste is requisite and right, so that even the Brahmins, by means of compromise, live the first part of their life in the normal way, that is in world- and life-affirmation, and only in the second part of his life does he terminate his life in complete renunciation of the world, that is in world- and life-negation. But further, because the doctrine of reincarnation, a doctrine which "cannot fit in with Brahmanic mysticism,"<sup>75</sup> the identity of individual souls with the Universal Soul, stands in close and living relation to ethics, it was adopted by the Brahmins. Hence alongside Brahmanism comes into being the Samkhya doctrine which "undertakes to investigate the relation of the soul to the world of senses in such a way that its imprisonment within that world and liberation from it will become comprehensible"<sup>76</sup> gives rise to Jainism and Buddhism, new varieties of the teaching of Samkhya in which ethics attain a greater importance.

In Jainism is found the Ahimsa commandment which is regarded as the highest form of ethics, but it does not, according to Schweitzer, arise from compassion but from the general principle of non-activity as it results from Indian world- and life-negation as such.

In the ethics of the Buddha, who qualified world- and life-denial when he preached an inner freedom from the world rather than

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 67.



for outward denial of the world practised in detail, is found the idea of action in that he preached to attain to true self-transcendence which leads to union with the Universal Soul, man should demonstrate his inward emancipation from the world by outwardly-expressed ethical conduct, that is, in compassionate love. But this is incomplete for he does not attain to the ethic of action in the spirit of love because he accepts the principle of non-activity, which derives from world- and life-negation, and because of his own concept of the nature of suffering and deliverance from suffering.

In later Mahayana-Buddhism, the logical outcome of primitive Buddhism, progress in ethics may be measured by comparing Gotama Buddha's saying, "Those who love nothing in the world are rich in joy and free from pain." With the saying of later Buddhism, "As long as living creatures suffer, there is no possibility of joy for those who are full of compassion!" Yet, like primitive Buddhism, the Mahayana is still tied to the idea of world- and life-negation and its way to redemption is not that of practical mercy.

While the Samkhya doctrine, Jainism, and Buddhism, did tower above and overshadow Brahmanic thought for centuries, they gradually lost ground and the simpler Brahmanic mysticism regained its power over the minds of men. In the meantime, however, the Brahmanic doctrine had pursued its independent course with the formulation of the Vedanta which stereotyped the main doctrine of the Upanishads and received its final fixation in the Brahmasutras, which essay the impossible task of reconciling identity of the soul and the World-Soul with the doctrine of reincarnation and deliverance from it.



Later expositions such as Samkara's took the form of commentaries on the Brahmasutras. Samkara, by his recognition of a new way of redemption which even people who remain in ordinary life may tread, that is, those who hold the world of the senses as real and believe the Brahman to be a divinity according to a lower truth, can through right worship of this Brahman-divinity attain to no further re-birth and enter into the lower Brahman from which at some later period and without anything further attain to the state of real absorption into the pure Brahman, made a tremendous concession to world- and life-affirmation.

Hinduism existed alongside of Brahmanism as the religion of the people, the mystical Bhakti religion. In its most highly developed form, it becomes monotheistic, but the one God makes His appearance under the names of many gods. Although active self-devotion to God is demanded, the Bhakti faith does not reach the thought of expressing love to God in active love to man; the God it worships is supra-ethical. Nevertheless, though in theory, Hinduism, under the Brahmanistic spell, cleaves to world- and life-negation, in practice, it gets very near to world- and life-affirmation and the two attitudes are more and more at variance within it. The Bhagavad-Gita, which concludes that activity is no less justified than non-activity, makes notable concessions to the latter. However, the activity contemplated is not the free activity dictated by the impulses of the heart but only activity in connection with the fulfilment of its obligations of caste. Within the world-view of world- and life-negation, action can only be justified at all as performed in devotion to God. Since the God of the



Bhagavad-Gita is supra-ethical, it is forced to regard non-ethical action as sometimes required by God.

It is from popular ethics that the idea of active love necessarily within a world-view of world- and life-affirmation pushes its way into Hindu thought even in quite early times as is evidenced in the Kural. Then, that Rama, the absolutely ethical god, in the Middle Ages, came to be venerated equally with Vishnu, Siva and Krishna is of paramount importance for the development of ethics in the popular religion. Ramananda teaches devotion to God, who is conceived as an ethical personality, must be manifested in love to man and that caste differences should be abolished.

When Hinduism in the Bhagavad-Gita first attained equality of spiritual rights by harmonizing its own world- and life-affirmation with Brahmanism's world- and life-negation, and when support by Samkara of its claim to spiritual equality with Brahmanism is found, it usurps the place of Brahmanism by reading its own doctrine both into the Brahmanic and into the sacred texts. This process began with Ramanuja and in modern times is associated with such names as Ram Mohan Ray, Debendranath and Rabindranath Tagore, Keshab Chandra Sen and Dayanand Sarasvati to Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. These great religious and ethical personalities, in which ethical world- and life-affirmation in Hinduism becomes ever more significant, nevertheless fail to think to a conclusion how the active love they urge can be reconciled with their world- and life-denying mysticism. They are under the authority of tradition, but would read into the ancient texts what is not there.



With Rabindranath Tagore, "a process of development which had been going on for centuries reaches in him its natural conclusion."<sup>77</sup> This development Tagore will not, however, admit for he sees his world- and life-affirming ethical mysticism is contained in the ancient Indian wisdom. For Tagore, the Brahmanic explanation of the Universe is a play, which originated in world- and life-negation, and is transformed by world- and life-affirmation. God is explained as making the Universe proceed from Himself because His nature is love and this presupposes something which possesses a certain independence in its relation to Him. That man should be united to God in love is regarded by him as the fulfilment of the meaning of the Universe. Tagore, then, will not admit that human thought must accept the Universe as something inexplicable but like the European rationalists of the eighteenth century tries to interpret it optimistically. All altruistic action is regarded as serving toward the realization of the world purpose: the world-will we experience in ourselves, therefore, we should completely surrender to the world-will. Schweitzer's conclusion of Tagore is this:

Tagore sets up the true ideal of ethical world-view when in similar fashion he demands spiritual as well as active union with infinite Being and derives activity from spiritual sources. But he cannot succeed in basing this world-view on real knowledge of the Universe. He derives it from an optimistic-ethical interpretation of the world which is related to that of Shaftesbury and Fichte and is as little capable of satisfying critical thought as theirs is.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 239.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 248.



Schweitzer's journey into Indian thought brought him to certain definite conclusions. Confirmed was his view that world-view of world- and life-negation has not equal justification with that of world- and life-affirmation and cannot compete with it. By its nature it is impractical. In measure as it becomes ethical, it ceases to exist.

A comparison of Indian and Western thought did point out to Albert Schweitzer the inadequacy of each in the great problem of attaining to a mysticism of ethical world- and life-affirmation. In European thought, in general, that which is the essence and grandeur of Indian mysticism, to wit, depth, is lacking. It is in the mystic alone that the oneness of our being can be related to the infinity of being. However, European ethics, having removed themselves from this last and genuine objective, have therefore, not in any true sense, a world-view at all. On the other hand, Indian thought fails to take into account, despite the depths of its mystical insights, an idea self-evident to European thought, that of the impulse to action. Like nearly all mystical beliefs, the great exception being Pauline mysticism, Indian thought leads to a unity of man and the world. But the ethical system realized by Indian thinkers, however, has no organic relationship with their cosmic philosophy, and thus it remains important, yet incapable of transforming the world in an ethical sense. Both, then, must progressively seek to develop the same objective, and, in this, they are already on the way. To be plunged into the depths, to become one with Infinite Being, this is the great task of thought. But, it is not speculation as to the meaning of the Universe that will lead us to



this end as the tragedy of Occidental philosophy shows; thought can rise only out of the certainties engendered by the moral will. At this point we are in need of a mystical life. When ethics and mysticism are transmuted into each other, man gains a true world-view which serves as a spur to action, to action that leads to a full realization of the individual and of the society together.

Philosophy, as we have already said, was for Schweitzer a major field of study at the University of Strasbourg. During his years at Strasbourg, it is almost inconceivable he did not deal with the philosophic position of the great philosophers. His acquaintance with Western philosophy is well demonstrated in his Civilization and Ethics. In much of this work he discusses one philosophic position after another to reveal them insufficient as the ethical basis for the restoration of civilization. In the next chapter we will deal with Schweitzer's conclusions of those philosophers with whom he dealt.

We cannot, however, state definitively the influence they might have had in the direction of "reverence for life." Where there is a similarity with his own thinking, it may have been the result of their influence. Where they differ, they may have served at least to make him come to terms with the problems considered. It is probably safe to say that each philosopher in one way or another played a part in a fertile soil of which "reverence for life" emerged. This is well expressed by Clark, who writes:

Schweitzer's criticisms of the shortcomings of previous ethical philosophies constitute but one side of his philosophical development. He also absorbed many methods and principles from some of the philosophies he criticized. Even when he swims



against the current of the larger intellectual movements of the nineteenth century, he is unconsciously swept along by them, and perhaps owes more to them than he is willing to acknowledge.<sup>79</sup>

#### "Reverence for Life." The Outcome of Problems Agitating Its Author

While the first indication we have of Schweitzer's interest in human civilization goes back to his early years at the University of Strasbourg, his interest in human civilization has roots in his childhood and youth. One should not underestimate the cultural enthusiasm of the Enlightenment, and the general tradition, dominated by cultural ideals, of the German protestant parsonage in which he grew up.

Then, as a growing boy, Schweitzer had a passion for reading. In particular he leaned to contemporary history, an interest he regarded as an inheritance from his mother. So thorough was his reading in contemporary history, that when he was going to school in Mulhausen and living there with his uncle, he was able to give a remarkably complete and accurate account to the most difficult questions that were posed to him by his uncle. With respect to his interest in contemporary history, Picht writes, "Without this exceptionally lively interest in questions of public life, it would be difficult to understand why the youth should have been so moved at its decline."<sup>80</sup>

Schweitzer's interest in human civilization is again demonstrated by his undertaking of social work while a young student at the University of Strasbourg. Augustiny believes his concern for the state of civilization arose out of this. He writes:

<sup>79</sup> Clark, Henry, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>80</sup> Picht, Werner, op. cit., p. 92.



I sense that it must have been in the first Strasbourg years when he undertook social work, when he visited poor families and took notes on their condition. Strasbourg at that time was, relatively speaking, a city fairly undisturbed in its setting; it was, more than today, a university city, but even then it contained people who were victims of social change, who, by reason of illness or other misfortunes, had lost their jobs and who, without a neighbor's aid or some help from relatives, would face acute misery with their wives and children.<sup>81</sup>

In Out of My Life and Thought, Schweitzer tells us as early as his first years at the University he began to feel misgivings about the current opinion that mankind is automatically and constantly developing in the direction of progress. In fact, in spite of the complacent confidence in the upward march of progress, Schweitzer sensed a decline had set in and was far advanced. This conclusion he drew from the many symptoms of decline which he noticed, the most ominous being a general approbation of short-sighted policies, both national and social, which failed to arouse public indignation, and a growing tendency to confound the moral with the expedient. From these and other signs of intellectual and spiritual fatigue, accompanied by a recrudescence of superstition, his own impression "was that in our mental and spiritual life we were not only below the level of past generations, but were in many respects only living on their achievements... and that not a little of this heritage was beginning to melt away in our hands."<sup>82</sup>

Schweitzer spent the summer of 1899 in Berlin. In the intellectual circles in which he moved, matters pertaining to the state

<sup>81</sup> Augustiny, Waldemar, op. cit., p. 149.

<sup>82</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 117.



of man's society were frequently discussed. One such occasion sufficiently motivated him to undertake his first work on civilization. He himself has given us a vivid account of the occasion of his first interest in working out a systematic philosophy of civilization. He writes:

My first incitement to take up this subject I had received in the summer of 1899 at the house of the Curtius family in Berlin. Hermann Grimm and others were conversing there one evening about a sitting of the academy from which they had just come, when suddenly one of them--I forget which it was--came out with: 'Why, we are all of us just nothing but 'Epigoni'!' It struck home with me like a flash of lightning, because it put into words what I myself felt.<sup>83</sup>

After that evening, Schweitzer was "inwardly occupied" with a book which he entitled Wir Epigonen. When the thoughts contained in it were put before friends, Schweitzer found they considered them "interesting paradoxes and manifestations of a fin-de-siecle pessimism."<sup>84</sup> Consequently he thereafter kept his ideas strictly to himself, and only in sermons allowed his doubts about our civilization and our spirituality to find expression. This book, however, did not materialize, nevertheless the sense of the decline of civilization remained with him.

In Schweitzer's resolve at age twenty-one to devote himself to human service, we again see his concern with human civilization. At age thirty, he began to carry out this resolve by turning to the study of medicine in order that, as a doctor, he would be able to

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 117.



serve without the use of words. Part reason for his going to Africa to practise medicine, is, as we have already seen, to help atone for the sins which the white man committed there.

With the outbreak of the First World War, in August, 1914, Schweitzer's work as a doctor was suddenly interrupted when, as German citizens, he and his wife were interned by the French authorities. This internment offered a two-fold impetus to his concern about the present state of civilization. World War I was concrete proof that he was not mistaken in his previous judgment of the disintegration of civilization. The effects of the war raging in Europe were being keenly felt in Lambarene as well as in all parts of the world. Hence, Schweitzer's deep concern for the civilization of the West came to include the destiny of all man. Moreover, his internment provided the needed leisure to turn to the problem of the decay of Western civilization, well aware that other civilizations, too, were being directly or indirectly influenced by its decay. During the next few months, then, Schweitzer set down his thoughts about the decay of Western civilization.

It was not until the summer of 1915, when awaking "from a sort of stupor" he decided to offer something constructive. It was certainly reasonable to suspect that he would have offered as the reason for the collapse of Western civilization the fact that men had failed to follow the ethic of Jesus for Schweitzer's religious-historical investigations reflect his concern for the decay of civilization and presumably he conceived them as a major attempt in the direction of the restoration of civilization. That this is undoubtedly the case is



evident from the following excerpt from the modified second edition of The Quest of the Historical Jesus which we quote now at some considerable length.

If the signs of the time do not mislead us, we are entering into an age that is drifting in precisely the opposite direction. All progress in knowledge notwithstanding, we have experienced in the past few decades a stagnation of our civilization which manifests itself in every area of life. There are even numerous signs of a genuine retrogression. The sickness displays manifold symptoms, but the root cause is to be found in this condition: nothing in our civilization, including religion, is providing enough ethical ideals and energies. It has lost the great aim of the moral perfection of all mankind, and it is hemmed in by the walls of national and sectarian ideals instead of encompassing the whole world in its vision. Its greatness and its goodness pretend to be self-sufficient, whereas they ought to put themselves at the service of that general ethical perfection which, in accordance with the preaching of Jesus, one may call the Kingdom of God. These values of civilization only possess genuine ethical worth to the extent that they do serve this end.

... Those who see where we are headed and do not allow themselves to become insensitive to the tragedy of our situation, but rather experience again and again the woe that hangs over the future of the world, are ready to encounter the historical Jesus and to understand what He has to say to us despite the strangeness of his language. With Him (who also experienced a similar despair in the terms of thought current in His day) they perceive that we shall be saved from present conditions through a mighty hope for the Kingdom of God and a will dedicated to it. With Him they know that such a hoping and willing can afford to be scornful of the circumstances as they appear. With Him they perceive that we must find support, freedom and peace in our faith in the invincible power of the moral spirit; that we must spread this faith and the convictions concerning daily life which it involves; that we must find the highest good in the Kingdom of God and live for it.

Of greatest importance in this world-view are its qualities of enthusiasm and heroism, which spring from the will and faith that are centered in the Kingdom of God and which are augmented rather than diminished by unfavourable conditions. . . .

But we bow before the mighty will that stands behind it, and we seek to serve this will in our time, that it may be born in us in new vitality and fruitfulness, and that it may work toward fulfill-



ment in us and in the world.<sup>85</sup>

However, this was not to be the case.

The obvious question we might ask is why. One can only speculate here as to the process of Schweitzer's thinking for he does not offer any compelling reasons for his motives here. A suggestion offered by one writer is that Schweitzer's certitude of being, after Paul, incorporate in the mystical body of Christ had failed him, perhaps as a result of his having found that it was largely a matter of feeling and experience rather than proof.<sup>86</sup> Whether or not this be the case, we have no way of knowing, but in view of Schweitzer's later pronouncements as contained in Christianity and the Religions of the World, in Out of My Life and Thought and in his epilogue to E. N. Mozely's book, The Theology of Albert Schweitzer for Christian Inquirers, as well as in numerous other pronouncements, this would not seem to be the case. However, we must remember, too, by this time Schweitzer had arrived at his "reverence for life" and had concluded it was the ethic of Jesus "widened into universality" and "recognized as the logical consequence of thought."<sup>87</sup>

As to other reasons why Schweitzer chose not to advance man's failure to follow the ethic of Jesus as the cause of the decay of Western civilization and His ethic as the basis for its restoration,

<sup>85</sup> Clark, Henry, The Philosophy of Albert Schweitzer, London: Meuthen, 1962, pp. 199-203.

<sup>86</sup> Murray, John, Middleton, op. cit., p. 141f.

<sup>87</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 180.



there are a number of other possibilities. One possible reason is that the Christian religion is not a universal religion and therefore Schweitzer felt compelled to search for a new factor, which, like the Christian religion, can work for the restoration of any civilization. Another possible reason is Schweitzer's belief that the Christian religion is no longer a force in the spiritual life of our age and therefore it is powerless to resist the spirit of the age. This view, including the cause for this situation, is expressed in an essay entitled "Religion in Modern Civilization." Then another possible reason is that Schweitzer felt few people could or would sense in his dynamic Jesus the mystical inspiration which he himself experienced. This may account for the fact that with respect to this aspect of his thought Schweitzer has never made any considerable effort to secure a wider popularity for his theological views. Still another possible reason is Schweitzer's realization that Jesus' ethic of love governs only man's conduct toward others, and even here, by his interpretation of Jesus' public ministry in the context of His mistaken apocalyptic expectation, His ethic was not universal, and further it did not govern man's conduct toward himself. And finally, we cannot discount the possibility that Schweitzer felt the intellectual need to give some kind of philosophic expression to Jesus' ethic so that it might be universally recognized as a necessity both for thought and action.

Whence then, the restoration? That civilization had collapsed, was evident. But what is civilization? For Schweitzer, the real essential nature of civilization is ultimately ethical. Proceeding then from the assumption that in modern civilization ethical considerations had



once been prominent, he put the following question to himself: "But how could it come about that the modern attitude of the world and life changed from its original ethical character and become nonethical?"<sup>88</sup> The only possible explanation, he concluded, was that it was not founded on thought. The original bonds between world- and life-affirmation and the ethical had increasingly parted and finally dissolved, the result being that European humanity was, to an increasingly larger extent "being guided by a will-to-progress that has become merely external and has lost its bearings."<sup>89</sup> Hence, the only possible way out of the chaos "is for us to come once more under the control of the ideals of true civilization through the adoption of an attitude toward life that contains those ideals,"<sup>90</sup> that is, one in which world- and life-affirmation and the ethical are connected and founded by thought.

Haunted by a conviction that there was a necessary connection between world- and life-affirmation and the ethical, in the next few months Schweitzer concentrated on a solution to this problem. The connection continued to elude him: "I was wandering about in a thicket in which no path was to be found. I was leaning with all my might against an iron door which would not yield."<sup>91</sup>

This problem continued to engage Albert Schweitzer, when in September, 1915, he found himself on a river journey bound on an

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 123.



errand of mercy. It was on this occasion he came to his momentus discovery. This memorable occasion is well described by Schweitzer.

While in this mental condition I had to undertake a longish journey on the river. . . . Slowly we crept upstream, laboriously feeling--it was the dry season--for the channels between the sandbanks. Lost in thought I sat on the deck of the barge, struggling to find the elementary and universal conception of the ethical which I had not discovered in any philosophy. Sheet after sheet I covered with disconnected sentences, merely to keep myself concentrated on the problem. Late on the third day, at the very moment when, at sunset, we were making our way through a herd of hippopotamuses, there flashed upon my mind, unforeseen and unsought, the phrase, 'Reverence for Life.' The iron door had yielded: the path in the thicket had become visible. Now I had found my way to the idea in which affirmation of the world and ethics are contained side by side! Now I knew that the ethical acceptance of the world and of life, together with the ideals of civilization contained in this concept, had a foundation in thought.<sup>92</sup>

As a result of this discovery, the plan of his philosophy of civilization was conceived. He projected the undertaking into four parts: critical analysis, solution in terms of "reverence for life," exposition of the concept of "reverence for life," and the total question of the civilized state. By 1923, the first two volumes, The Decay and Restoration of Civilization and Civilization and Ethics appeared in print. However, although he has since 1923 continued to work on the third part of his philosophy and the fourth, these volumes were never

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 124.



completed for print.<sup>93, 94</sup>

A number of reasons have been advanced to account for the fact that these last two volumes were never completed. One tenable

<sup>93</sup> Picht writes: (p. 274) "The plan for the philosophy of civilization has in the meantime been reduced to three volumes. The writing of the third volume has gone so far that one may expect its publication, if not in Schweitzer's lifetime then from his literary papers." As well, Picht writes: (p. 117) "Schweitzer regards what he has given us so far in the ethic of reverence for life, as a sketch but; it clearly outlines the edifice as a whole, and it is hardly likely that its extension would alter the picture in any fundamental aspect." (Picht, Albert Schweitzer, The Man and His Work)

<sup>94</sup> Joy and Arnold report in their The Africa of Albert Schweitzer that they were shown the manuscript and report on its condition, some of which is written on unpaid hotel bills. They write:

"He turns to one of the shelves behind him, and pulls down a great pile of papers. Sections of it are tied together with string.

"So that they will not get out of order," he says. This is the manuscript on which I have worked for a quarter of a century, and it serves as a diary of my life. Look. He points to a page, the left-hand portion of which is filled with his writing. Alongside the right-hand margin are listed the places where the writing has taken place. . . .

Suddenly he exclaims, "Ah, you see!" pointing to the torn fragment of a page. This is the page that Leonie has eaten. And he laughs loudly.

Again he turns to the sketches and brings down more manuscript, piles upon piles of it.

"The problem is to make a book of 250 pages out of this. . . .

"Are you working on the book steadily?" I ask.

"I try to work every evening on it, after the day's work is done," he says, "but for a month and a half now, I haven't been able to work on it at all, because of a very sick patient, who has demanded all of my time. I shall not be able to finish it until I return to Europe and have some months of quiet at my home. For me that is the most important thing now. I shall be heartbroken if I could not finish my book."



possibility is advanced by Russell. Russell writes:

The tragic trend of events in the last twenty years has made its author, I think, feel that it is impossible as yet to express his thought in such a way that men will listen to what is so diametrically opposed to current thought and opinion. But now again in Africa, he is still working on these books, and it may be hoped that now men's minds, schooled in suffering, are more recipient of thoughts that matter and are turning to 'reconstruction,' he will soon deem it advisable to allow publication.<sup>95</sup>

Another tenable possibility is advanced by Murray. He writes:

It is significant that he has not produced this volume. If he had written nothing more, one would naturally have ascribed this omission to the heavy demands upon his energies made by the maintenance of the hospital. But this is not so. He turned aside to write the massive volume on The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle, which he did not finish until 1930, and then yet again to write a book on Indian Thought and its Development (1936). One can only conclude that he found his projected and promised book impossible to write.

And the reason is pretty clear. To his thinking the civilized state is really a contradiction in terms. Those who accept the ethic of 'Reverence for Life' cannot accept the state, for it is an ethic of personal relations which cannot be mediated. In other words, it is the Kingdom of God or nothing.<sup>96</sup>

Whatever the reason may be, it is more than strange that his philosophy of civilization, in spite of the numerous demands on his time, but with his anxiety to bring it to completion, as is evidenced in his exchange with Joy, was never completed.

<sup>95</sup> Russell, Lillian, The Path to Reconstruction, New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1941, p. 15.

<sup>96</sup> Murray, John, Middleton, op. cit., p. 167.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE STATE OF CIVILIZATION AS SEEN BY ALBERT SCHWEITZER AND THE CAUSES FOR THE PRESENT SITUATION

For well over a half century, Albert Schweitzer has repeatedly proclaimed the vaunted civilization of the Western World was disintegrating and was in danger of total collapse. The impending catastrophe was not solely a Western concern, but a tragedy involving all civilization: "All of them are, like ourselves, diseased, and only as we recover can they recover."<sup>1</sup> While Schweitzer sensed the decay of the Western civilization as early as his first years at the University and on a number of occasions quietly voiced his deep concern for the fate of Western civilization among friends and in his sermons, it was not until the publication of the first two volumes of his philosophy of civilization in 1923 that his views were proclaimed to a much wider audience, indeed a world audience. In the first of the two volumes, he writes:

We are living to-day under the sign of the collapse of civilization. . . . What yet remains of it is no longer safe. It is still standing, indeed, because it was not exposed to the destructive pressure which overwhelmed the rest, but, like the rest, is built upon rubble, and the next landslide will very likely carry it away.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Decay and Restoration of Civilization, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-3.



Thereafter, his repeated prophecy became increasingly more ominous. In 1932, he wrote:

In my judgment, too, of the situation in which mankind finds itself at the present time I am pessimistic. I cannot make myself believe that the situation is not so bad as it seems to be, but I am inwardly conscious that we are on a road which, if we continue to tread it, will bring us into 'Middle Ages' of a new character.<sup>3</sup>

And, again, in 1932:

After all what is now taking place in this terrible epoch of ours except a gigantic repetition of the drama of Faust upon the stage of the world. The cottage of Philemon and Baucis burns with a thousand tongues of flame! In deeds of violence and murders a thousandfold, a brutalized humanity plays its cruel game! Mephistopheles leers at us with a thousand grimaces!<sup>4</sup>

Then, 1947, Schweitzer is reported as having told visitors at Lambarene that the Second World War, the result of the underlying conditions leading to the tragic collapse of civilization, accelerated the process of collapse; however, he noted, "Nothing has occurred to change these underlying conditions. They continue and steadily worsen."<sup>5</sup>

And in 1949, he wrote:

We are at the beginning of the end of the human race. The question before it is whether it will use for beneficial purposes or for purposes of destruction the power which modern science has placed in its hands. So long as the capacity for destruction was limited, it was possible to hope that reason would set a limit to

<sup>3</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 187.

<sup>4</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Goethe: Two Addresses (trans. C. R. Joy and C. T. Campion) Boston: Beacon Press, 1948, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> . "Schweitzer Sees End of Civilization," The Christian Century, 64, October, 1947, p. 1016.



disaster. Such an illusion is impossible to-day, when the power is illimitable.<sup>6</sup>

And before his death in 1965, he wrote:

We live in a dark and frightening age. . . . The atomic bomb dropped upon the Japanese city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, provided a foretaste of the ravages and human misery that the widespread use of such weapons would produce. . . . The salvation of mankind depends upon the success of such a (humanitarian) policy. Lacking it, we are doomed to living in a deepening misery, or to final annihilation.<sup>7</sup>

### Civilization Defined

The criterion which Schweitzer uses to judge the age is contained in his definition of Kultur.<sup>8</sup> Hitherto, Schweitzer says it was supposed that a definition was unnecessary "since we already possessed the thing itself,"<sup>9</sup> hence the question seems never to have

<sup>6</sup> Mozley, E. N., The Theology of Albert Schweitzer for Christian Enquirers, London: A. and C. Black, 1950, p. 107.

<sup>7</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Teaching of Reverence for Life, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965, pp. 59-63.

<sup>8</sup> As a translation of the German "Kultur," the choice, today, of the word "civilization" is indeed unfortunate. Nearly as unfortunate is the substitution of the word "culture." "Civilization," as generally understood today, has come to mean something which relates to the material welfare of mankind, the amelioration of all that concerns his circumstances and environment, while "culture," as generally understood today, has come to mean something which relates to the improvement of the mind in science, art, literature; and the like, the enhancement of the sensibilities of the conscience or soul. For Schweitzer, "Kultur" includes both of these. Further Schweitzer claims "Kultur" and "civilization" bears the same meaning and any attempt to establish a difference between them, neither philologically nor historically justified, promotes a belief in an ethical form of civilization alongside an unethical.

<sup>9</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Decay and Restoration of Civilization, p. 35.



been answered because, it seems, it was never really put. However, in Schweitzer's opinion, the state of present civilization makes a definition imperative.

Civilization is defined by Schweitzer as "the sum total of all progress made by men and the individual man in every sphere of action and from every point of view, in so far as this progress helps toward the spiritual perfecting of individuals as the progress of all progress."<sup>10</sup> Or, as it is described in The Decay and the Restoration of Civilization, it is "progress, material and spiritual progress, on the part of individuals as of the mass."<sup>11</sup> It presupposes the co-operation of the two forms of progress: an increasing mastery over the forces of nature and a mastery of reason over human ideas in order to prevent the pressing into service of natural forces being used to intensify the struggle for existence. Through a corresponding increase of the mastery of reason over nature and human nature, the struggle for existence is correspondingly lessened and more favourable conditions of life are established. The objective here is "the spiritual and moral perfecting of individuals, which is the ultimate object of civilization."<sup>12</sup> Reason as such is thus ethically determined. Its mastery of human ideas will express itself in the willingness of

<sup>10</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Decay and Restoration of Civilization, p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 36.



"both individuals and the mass to let their willing be determined by the material and spiritual good of the whole and the individuals that compose it; that is to say, their actions are ethical."<sup>13</sup>

### The Symptoms of Decay

What were the symptoms of its decay? To answer that question, Schweitzer's definition of civilization must be kept in mind. Two significant points of his definition are these: the legitimacy, indeed, the indispensability of progress in technological mastery of nature is asserted, and "the ultimate object of civilization" is seen to be "the spiritual and moral perfecting of individuals." Material and spiritual-ethical forms of progress, in other words, must work side by side. The failure of European civilization is not in the field of material progress; on the contrary, the trouble is that the control of reason over the moral dispositions of men has not kept pace with its control over nature, and consequently the equilibrium between technological and spiritual progress has been destroyed.

In modern European thought a tragedy is occurring in that the original bonds uniting the affirmative attitude toward the world with ethics are, by slow but irresistible process, loosening and finally parting. The result that we are coming to is that European humanity is being guided by a will-to-progress that has become merely external and has lost its bearings.<sup>14</sup>

We have become charmed by our material achievements which has resulted in a defective conception of civilization: "In this

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 122.



way our own age, having never taken the trouble to reflect, arrived at the opinion that civilization consists primarily in scientific, technical and artistic achievements, and that it can reach its goal without ethics, or, at any rate, with a minimum of them.<sup>15</sup> But material progress does not equal civilization, "but become civilization only so far as the mental habit of civilized peoples is capable of allowing them to aim at the perfecting of the individual and the community."<sup>16</sup> While, then, material progress has made the conditions of human existence incomparably more favourable, it brings with it manifold dangers to the human element.

Modern social problems involve us in a class struggle which shakes and shatters economic and national relations. If we go down to rock-bottom, it was machinery and world commerce which brought about the world war, and the inventions which put into our hands such mighty power of destruction made the war of such a devastating character that conquered and conquerors alike are ruined for a period of which no one can see the end. It was also our technical achievements which put us in a position to kill at such a distance, and to annihilate men in such masses, that we sank so low as to push aside any last impulse to humanity, and were mere blind wills which made use of perfected lethal weapons of such destructive capacity that we were unable to maintain the distinction between combatants and non-combatants.<sup>17</sup>

Material progress makes civilization not easier but more difficult.

Further, it makes greater demands on the thought of people.

Aside from the outstripping of spiritual progress by material progress, in general, a process of materialization, Schweitzer lays

<sup>15</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Decay and the Restoration of Civilization, p. 40.

<sup>16</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 4.



rather heavy stress also upon the manner in which the individual personality is violated or suppressed. Men no longer think, in fact, the age disdains thinking and mistrusts thought, and everywhere discredits it. Hence, modern man, sapped of all confidence in his own thinking, is driven into skepticism, the majority losing all feeling for truth and for sincerity, "the foundation of the spiritual life."<sup>18</sup> The spirit of the age loves the complicated, the profound. It loves violence and "dissonance, in tones, in lines and in thought."<sup>19</sup> Propaganda has replaced the truth. Man's trust now is in organizations: individual thought and personal moral judgment have given way to collective thought and to group morality. Man has thus become brutalized, machine-like, insensitive to suffering and death, to cruelty and injustice. Ethical idealism has fallen out of favour; from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, behaviour became increasingly to be guided by actuality, by what appears rather than by what ought to appear. Confidence is placed in the facts and assumed is the existence of principles of progress in the facts. This has given rise to a chauvinistic nationalism which has been raised to the same level of civilization itself. Law has collapsed. Parliaments pass statutes which contradict the idea of law. States deal arbitrarily with its citizens and when one of these come to be dominated by a foreign power, no respect is shown for their human rights. Such is the

<sup>18</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 174.

<sup>19</sup> Seaver, George, "Religion in Modern Civilization," Albert Schweitzer: The Man and His Mind, New York: Harper, 1947, p. 338.



condition of modern man.

### Philosophy, the Major Cause of the Disintegration of Western Civilization

According to Schweitzer's historical thinking, there was a time when the will to material progress and the will to moral progress were united that "the age of true civilization seemed to have dawned upon the world and to be assured of an uninterrupted development."<sup>20</sup> This was the age of the Illuminati of the eighteenth century. Their impulse to establish such high ideals of civilization and their confidence in the realization of those ideals came from their world-view which was optimistic and ethical.

Its optimism consists in that it assumes as ruling in the world a general purpose directed to the achievement of perfection, and that from this purposiveness the efforts of individual men and of mankind in general to secure material and spiritual progress derive meaning and importance, and in addition a guarantee of success. This conception is ethical because it regards the ethical as something in accordance with reason, and on that ground demands from man that, putting egoistic interests behind him, he shall devote himself to all ideals that are waiting for realization, taking the ethical as in everything the standard by which to judge. A habit of humane thought is for the Rationalists an ideal which they can by no consideration be induced to resign.<sup>21</sup>

On this conviction, such great reforms were undertaken that "the greatest epoch in the history of human civilization now dawns."<sup>22</sup> The work of reform undertaken in this period is well described in Civilization and Ethics, and in an essay "Religion in Modern Civilization" is

<sup>20</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Decay and the Restoration of Civilization, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 91.



admirably summed up.

... It waged war against superstition and ignorance. It obtained recognition for humanity in the eyes of the law. Torture was abolished, first in Prussia in the year 1740 through a cabinet order of Frederick the Great. It was demanded of the individual that he should place himself at the service of the community. English emigrants formulated in America for the first time the rights of man: The idea of humanity began to gain in significance. People dared to grasp the thought that lasting peace must reign on earth. Kant wrote a book on 'Everlasting Peace' (1795), and in it represented the thought that even politics must submit to the principles of ethics. Finally, an achievement which the spirit of the eighteenth century brought about in the nineteenth century, was the abolition of slavery.

The religious-ethical spirit of the eighteenth century desired then to make the kingdom of God a reality on earth.<sup>23</sup>

In Civilization and Ethics, special tribute is paid to the men of the age.

No book has been written yet which fully describes their achievements, doing justice to their origin, their character their number and their significance. We only really comprehend what they accomplished, because we experience the tragic fact that the most valuable part of it is lost to us, while we do not feel in ourselves any ability to reproduce it. They were masters of the facts of life to an extent which we are to-day quite unable to realize.<sup>24</sup>

That the great work of reform is never completed is due, in Schweitzer's opinion, to disruptions from without and convulsions from within. The wrong men had the responsibility of handling the affairs in Europe, the climax coming with Napoleon, who by the force of his own genius wrestled the power from the hands of the mob who had seized it and "lacking all but a superficial education, he is uninfluenced by the

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<sup>23</sup> Seaver, George, "Religion in Modern Civilization," Albert Schweitzer: The Man and His Mind, New York: Harper, 1947, p. 386.

<sup>24</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 98.



valuable convictions of his time"<sup>25</sup> and "Guided solely by the force of his own personality, he decides what is to happen in Europe, and hurls it into wars through which it sinks into misery."<sup>26</sup> While he did reorganize France and create a new State, the State which he created was not the State "which is ethical and in harmony with reason, but merely the State which works well."<sup>27</sup> While these chaotic events were in progress, the hitherto unopposed authority of the rational ideal was being undermined as men turned to the old traditionalisms--ecclesiastical, juridical, nationalistic--and all the narrow allegiances once more raised their heads.

Yet, these and other causes were not in themselves sufficient. There is something inherent in Rationalism itself that defeats itself; it contains, as it were, the seeds of its own destruction. The world-view of the Enlightenment was based on an illusory view of the world of nature, that is, it unwarrantedly assumed that an optimistic interpretation of the world of nature was rationally possible and asserted a harmony between the universe and the secularized Christian ethic.

The modern age was not the result of deeper ethical thought, but the influence exerted by the belief in progress, which arose out of the achievements of discovery and invention, and on the ethics which drew its life from Christian and Stoic thought. While the inner relations between ethics and world- and life-affirmation began to take

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 101.



effect, "The task before philosophy was to change the world- and life-affirmation which arose from enthusiasm of discovery and invention into a deeper, inner world- and life-affirmation arising out of thought about the universe and the life of man, and on that same foundation to build up an ethical system."<sup>28</sup>

However, seventeenth and eighteenth thinkers felt no need to provide a sure foundation for world- and life-affirmation and to deepen them by thought about the universe and the life of man. They did, though, feel the necessity to establish the nature of the ethical and they proceeded to their task, taking for granted world-affirmation and activity directed toward the general welfare, of answering "the question how the unegoistic makes its appearance beside the egoistic, and in what inner relation they stand to each other."<sup>29</sup> These are but further attempts "to consider the ethical problem in isolation, as if it consisted in reflections on the relation of the individual to himself and to society, these having no need to settle their position with regard to ultimate questions of the meaning of the world and of life."<sup>30</sup>

One attempted course was to assume that the egoistic in the thought of the individual does, by consistent meditation, automatically convert into the altruistic. This course is adopted by David Hartley and by Dietrich von Holbach. Harley "claims to see in altruism a purposive ennoblement of original selfishness"<sup>31</sup> when informed by

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 72.



rational thought. For Holbach, the individual who rightly understands his own interest "will always form his conception of it in connection with the interest of society"<sup>32</sup> and will as a consequence direct his activities to society as well.

This "psychological derivation of altruism from egoism",<sup>33</sup> cannot, in Schweitzer's view, produce any convincing result. The material relation between individual and society is not of such a character that the individual derives benefit from the latter just in proportion as he, by his moral conduct, aids to establish its prosperity. Nor are material and spiritual happiness so related that the one can find its continuation in the other: "Spiritual happiness is sufficient unto itself."<sup>34</sup>

A second attempted course was to suppose that altruism has its origin in the thought of society and passes over into the convictions of the individual. Despite their different points of view, this course is adopted by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Adrien Helvetius and Jeremy Bentham. Hobbes would set up an authority, empowered by the accord of the majority, to force individuals in the collective state into altruism. With society, Locke introduced spiritual conviction to coerce the individual into altruism. Helvetius regarded morality as enthusiastic action to which the individual is roused by society. For Bentham, the individual would be totally subordinated to the State, "an ethical

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 73.



personality,"<sup>35</sup> and receive from this "central power-station"<sup>36</sup> an intense conviction that altruism is the best policy for him.

These moralists, however, all commit the same error. They make morality originate outside the individual and they immobilize the ethical personality which is in man.

Another attempted course was to see altruism as a natural ability. David Hume and Adam Smith are representatives of this course. Both hold altruism is given to human nature independently and side by side with egotism, though, "it always appears there as the backward twin-brother who can be reared only with the most careful nursing."<sup>37</sup> However, nature has endowed man with the ability to share experientially in the lot of others. Hence ethical conduct, principally a matter of sympathy, or fellow-feeling, prompts man to aid his neighbours and to wish to contribute to their welfare as well as to that of society.

These men fail, however, to suspect the far-reaching consequences of the problem which they brought into the field of discussion. No attempt is made to settle the depth and extent of their sympathetic instinct in order to show how thought influences it and what the two have in common that the work of one can be promoted further by the other.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 80.



But the spirit of the time, remarkable for holding various ideas side by side, declared altruism "to be conceived as a rational ennobling of egoism, as a result of the influence of society, and in addition as a manifestation of a natural instinct."<sup>38</sup> The establishment of a natural element in ethics, did, when its consequences began to be felt, in the nineteenth century devour rational utilitarianism.

The "Intellectualists" and the "Intuitionists" oppose the utilitarian view of ethics. Among these anti-utilitarians, Schweitzer has named Ralph Cudworth, Henry More, Rev. Samuel Clarke, Bishop Richard Cumberland, and William Wollaston. For them, morality "is a striving after perfection, and this develops in us because it is implanted in our hearts by nature."<sup>39</sup> Altruistic action is, however, only a manifestation of the struggle for self-perfection.

Their significance lie in the fact that for them the meaning of the moral is to be found not merely in the useful character of the actions it inspires but also in the self-perfection of the individual which those actions bring about and in the fact that for them morality presupposes a moral personality. However, they fail to describe exactly the manner by which "men carry in them the idea of the good as a force which works effectively upon their character."<sup>40</sup> The content of their ethics, not really different from the utilitarians, lack the latter's enthusiastic driving force.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 85.



The position of Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury is uniquely singular. Not only does he oppose the utilitarians but the "Intellectualists" and the "Intuitionists" as well and offers a mediating position between them.

His significance, however, lies in the fact that he "plants ethical thoughts in the universe of reality, which he himself contemplates through an idealising optimism, reaching thereby a direct and universal notion of the moral."<sup>41</sup> His optimistic-ethical nature philosophy meets the needs of the age with its belief in progress and not only did he dominate popular thought completely but he precipitated a philosophic development, which, under his influence, continued until the end of the eighteenth century: "Hardly ever has any man had so direct and so powerful an influence on the formation of the world-view of his time..."<sup>42</sup>

As a result of such an optimistic-ethical world-view, the men of the eighteenth century proved capable of thinking out the ideals of civilization and moving toward their realization. While attempts to give ethics a foundation in reason had proved unsatisfactory, it did not move them, if indeed any consideration were given to this point. All inner problems of ethics were surmounted by their conviction that they possessed a rational conception of the world which afforded it an optimistic-ethical meaning.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 88.



While eighteenth-century Rationalism succeeded temporarily in giving support to its ideals and hence stimulating civilization by interpreting reality in such a way as to find meaning in it for human life and values, this "naive interpretation of the world,"<sup>43</sup> rooted in belief rather than founded on thought, could not stand up to the criticism of logical thought. Subsequent deep thinking even when it was not directed against rationalism or even when its intention was to strengthen its position hastened its decay.

Immanuel Kant was one of those. Kant recognized that the optimistic-ethical world-view, which was then regarded as proven, rested on foundations which were not sufficiently deep and attempted to shore up the tottering edifice. To him, ethics spring from "supranatural impulses"<sup>44</sup> hence "Utilitarian ethics must abdicate before the ethics of immediate and sovereign duty."<sup>45</sup> That the moral law has nothing to do with the natural world-order, but is super-sensible is the result of Kant's refusal to let the world of senses be accepted as anything more than a manifestation of the non-sensible which makes up true reality. Ethics then, "raises us above ourselves, frees us from the natural order of the world of the senses, and attaches us to a higher world-order."<sup>46</sup> Kant proceeded then to bring ethical idealism into

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 106.



connection with epistemological idealism, that is to build a theory of ethics upon a theory of knowledge: he would make morality dependent upon the postulates of God, free will and immortality and thus secure the position of the optimistic-ethical world-view.

But Kant succeeds only in initiating the downfall of the naive optimistic-ethical world-view of the eighteenth century. His awareness that ethics must spring from inward compulsion was a distinct advance but he does not successfully develop this, but succeeded in destroying the directness, the simplicity, which had been the glory of the eighteenth century ethics without re-establishing a morality with sufficient content or a sufficiently compelling character, thus loosening the connection which ethics and belief in progress had found with one another. Further, he erred in attempting to combine ethical idealism with epistemological idealism. Only two of the three postulates, God and immortality, can not be satisfactorily demonstrated, consequently, the entire edifice of moral obligation crumbles. That the optimistic-ethical world-view has been made secure, he deceives himself and the men of his time.

Just when Kant had begun to influence men's minds, the nature philosophy of Baruch Spinoza brought the optimistic-ethical world-view to confusion when, one hundred years after his death, this seventeenth century philosopher began to occupy people's attention. Spinoza had sought an ethics that was rooted in pure nature-philosophy. For this monistic and pantheistic nature philosopher, whose resignation is of a world- and life-affirming character, God, "life with a full



content,"<sup>47</sup> is merely the sum-total of nature who acts from an inner necessity. Since there is no such thing as doing, but only happenings, man's self-perfection consists in the living out of life guided by attaining to an ever more clearer understanding of his relation to the universe. Ethics "consist in living out our life more as manifested thought than in corporeal actuality."<sup>48</sup> No place for genuine devotion to the community is to be found in Spinoza since "the perfect human society appears automatically just in proportion as the individual members live according to reason."<sup>49</sup>

Spinoza succeeds in reaching a universal conception of ethics, and from the standpoint of consistent thought, recognizes all moral behaviour can be nothing but an expression of the relation of the individual to the universe. However, he cannot satisfy the demand of ethics, that is that man's relation to the universe shall be conceived as not merely a spiritual relation but at the same time an active devotion to it in the material world thus producing an effect upon it. Because he represents a threat to the optimism and the ethics of their world-view, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries attempt to suppress his philosophy.

The same danger to the seventeenth and eighteenth century world-view is represented by the nature-philosophy of Gottfried

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 119.



Wilhelm Leibniz. For Leibniz, the totality constituting the universe consists of countless tiny individualities, monads, and on this conception of reality, he attempts "to employ every possible device to attach an optimistic meaning to reality."<sup>50</sup>

While Leibniz's nature philosophy "corresponds to the multiform character of reality much better than does Spinoza's,"<sup>51</sup> the difficulties for ethics which Spinoza's nature-philosophy contained within itself, are found also in his. But Leibnitz commits "treason"<sup>52</sup> against nature-philosophy when, in spite of the fact that he does not recognize an abstract Absolute as the content of the universe, he "introduces into his nature-philosophy a theistic notion of God,"<sup>53</sup> thus making his philosophy acceptable to the eighteenth century "by giving it an optimistic, ethical and theistic expression."<sup>54</sup> Through Leibniz, thought awoke to nature-philosophy and contributed to making Spinoza influential.

When it was recognized that Kant and Spinoza were undermining the optimistic-ethical world-view of rationalism, German speculative philosophy realized the need "to rebuild, and attempt the process of arriving at a conception of optimism and ethics by direct thinking on the essential nature of the world,"<sup>55</sup> that is, by proceeding

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 123.



inductively they hoped to "learn how the real world has evolved out of the notion of Being."<sup>56</sup> The representatives of this speculative philosophy named by Schweitzer are Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Only Fichte and Hegel, however, produce unique world-views: "Schelling gets no further than a nature-philosophy, and stands almost completely aside from the struggle for an optimistic-ethical philosophy with which his age is occupied."<sup>57</sup>

Fichte, "by thinking Kant's thoughts out to a conclusion he aims at extracting from the universe a confession that it is purely optimistic-ethical."<sup>58</sup> For Fichte, the universe is "the phenomenal form of an infinite, self-determined will to activity."<sup>59</sup> The absolute ego appears as phenomenon in a world of sense because as infinite will to activity it cannot persist in being an ego and consequently establishes a non-ego as its limit in order that it may, in forever overcoming it, become conscious of itself as will to activity. This process occurs amid the multiplicity of finite rational beings who now perceive the world of senses as actuality. They overcome it by recognizing their inward mysterious duty, under the sovereignty of reason, and are united with the world-spirit.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 126.



Fichte's "is the first philosophy to declare plainly that no outlook on life is ethical which does not enable man to explain that an enthusiastic active devotion to the universe is grounded in the nature of the world and of life."<sup>60</sup> However, in spite of the fact that he provides a content to the abstract duty of Kant, "so general and so vague that the code of duty which is drawn from it has but little vital force,"<sup>61</sup> and gives a cosmic formulation to the utilitarian ethics of rationalism by his definition of ethics "as activity which aims at subjecting the material world to reason,"<sup>62</sup> he fails in making "a genuine combination of epistemological and ethical idealism so as to produce an ethical world-view which is a necessity of thought."<sup>63</sup> This latter fact becomes evident when no "differentiation between human action and world-happenings"<sup>64</sup> is made, and when the conception of the ethical "is not only too wide, but fantastic."<sup>65</sup> However, believing that the ethical "has found itself with him in the real nature of Being,"<sup>66</sup> Fichte's philosophy, by maintaining, even strengthening and deepening the optimistic, ethical spirit of rationalism, gives a tremendous impetus to ethics and civilization.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 128.



Friedrich von Schiller undertakes, using as a basis the deepened optimistic-ethical world-view of Kant and Fichte, to broaden the foundation of the ethical by showing its relation to the aesthetic. He offers "the idea that art and ethics belong together as far as that in both man maintains with the material world a relation which is free and creative."<sup>67</sup>

While Schiller popularizes Kant and Fichte, a fact of considerable significance in itself for the age, his failure to work out in detail in what way the capacity of freedom, resulting from aesthetic practice, disposes a man to morality, is indicative of the fact that he "has not gone to the bottom of the problem of the relations between the aesthetic and the ethical."<sup>68</sup>

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe stands as comparatively coldly "to the philosophy of the deepened rationalism as he does to that of ordinary rationalism"<sup>69</sup> for he does not share the belief that optimistic and ethical convictions are well founded. It is his reverence for the reality of nature which separates him from Kant, Fichte and Schiller. Hence, he "adheres to a magnificently unfinished world-view."<sup>70</sup> In striving for an ethical conception of the universe, he attributes no meaning to nature, but desirous of attributing a meaning to life, he

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 136.



holds this to be in serviceable activity which he does not presume to explain more completely.

While Goethe struggled to arrive at a conception of ethical activity, nature-philosophy proved unable to provide him with any criteria of what is ethical. The incompleteness of his position alienated and irritated his contemporaries who sought for knowledge of the world and of life which can be reduced to a system.

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher stands apart from both the ordinary and the deepened rationalism, too, for he is strongly influenced by Spinoza's nature-philosophy. Rejecting rationalism's enthusiasm for activity because one "runs the risk of losing himself and becoming unpersonal,"<sup>71</sup> Schleiermacher re-emphasizes Spinoza's ethics, but on the belief that progress is imminent, seeks to combine with it a more comprehensive interest in the world than is found in Spinoza. For Schleiermacher, we have "no other perfecting to bring about in things than that which is inherent to them."<sup>72</sup> Thus ethics is the recognition and description of the tendencies which appear in the world, together with behaviour in the same sense. The moral law is but the "law of nature arriving in man at the consciousness of itself."<sup>73</sup>

Such ethics, however, "are so toned down that there is no longer any real power in them,"<sup>74</sup> and do in Schleiermacher's philosophy

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 139.



play only a subordinate role. But the effect of a living nature-philosophy in Goethe and Spinozan nature-philosophy in Schleiermacher was to undermine the optimistic-ethical thinking of men at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, in his endeavour to explain the origin of the world from the notion of Being, studies the laws which govern events, as they are revealed in history and discovers its underlying principle. This is "that every process of becoming advances with natural progress, and that the progress realizes itself in the occurrence of a consecutive series of contradictions which invariably issue in reconciliation! . . . Every synthesis that is reached becomes again a thesis for a new antithesis. From these there results again a new synthesis, and so on for ever."<sup>75</sup> With the aid of this scheme, Hegel conceives the meaning of the world can be found only in the realm of the spirit. The Absolute has brought the world into existence for the purpose of becoming conscious of itself and as infinitely creative spirit, "of returning into itself by the road of its own creations."<sup>76</sup> Only dimly does the Absolute comprehend itself in nature. However, in man it experiences itself in three ascending stages: as subjective spirit in man who is concerned only with himself and nature; as objective spirit, and here shows its creative capacity "in the communal spirit of men who co-operate for the legal and ethical

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 141.



organization of human society,"<sup>77</sup> and as absolute spirit "existing in and for itself, and having overcome the contradictions of subject and object, thought and being"<sup>78</sup> in art, by contemplating itself as such, in religious devotion, by presenting itself as such, and in philosophy, by comprehending itself as such. Hence the ethical is but a phase in the development of the immaterial: civilization is conceived only as intellectual. Since being one with the Absolute is an experience of the universal spirit of collective humanity when it has reached its most lofty height, the only significance ethics have is to make possible the growth of a society in the collective spirit of which the absolute spirit can come to a full consciousness of itself. Hence, Hegel offers no ethics for the individual; ethics and the law are brought together.

Hegel's optimistic philosophy of history from which springs his "supra-ethical mysticism of world- and life-affirmation"<sup>79</sup> tended immediately to shore up the foundations of rationalism. That he is able only to place belief in progress--belief in imminent progress--upon a cosmic foundation but could find no place for ethics in his monumental system; that, in fact, while giving the individual will a universal content, he abandons completely a cosmic conception of ethics, seems not to have worried his contemporaries, who had, by now, grown accustomed to regarding ethics and belief in progress as

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 145.



originally connected. They regarded Hegel's strengthening of optimism as being a strengthening of ethics with the result optimism has been kept alive to the present day. However, the true result of Hegel's philosophy was the severing of the connection between ethics and belief in progress.

The impact of German idealism upon thought was felt at first only in Germany. In blissful ignorance that the optimistic-ethical world-view was already in ruins, the rest of Europe continued to share the dreams of utilitarianism. Hence earlier utilitarianism was revived, repeated and continued by Friedrich Eduard Beneke, Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach, Ernst Laas, Auguste Comte, James Mill and his son, John Stuart Mill.

Unexpected strong support for utilitarianism came from natural science. With the aid of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, morality can be shown to have more than an acquired faculty, having a biological origin. Altruism evolves out of egoism when reflection works upon it, and with the evolution of the species it gradually makes itself manifest in the individual. Gregarious primary instincts develop into social impulses when they are consciously recognized.

For the biological support utilitarianism received it was much poorer as a result, for the evolutionist theories rob ethics of all nobility. Since altruism, they hold, in a fully developed form will come in due time and meanwhile men cannot and really should not try to hasten the process along by earnest moral striving, individual ethics, which is directed to everything living in general and would lead to enthusiastic self-sacrifice, is replaced by a social ethics



which expresses neither natural sympathies nor instincts to benevolence, but only man's evolving realization of the strength to be gained from union with his own kind, a union requiring mutual interpersonal restraints, civilities, and kindnesses. This ethic, having only relative ethical standards, can only feebly rouse the will to the ethical. The individual would be sacrificed to the welfare of the organized state.

By the side of social ethics, socialism, which would impose upon the individual the corresponding conduct in the application of the conclusions of biology and scientific sociology, arises. Its program demands the abolition of private property, the State regulation of labour and the results of labour. This view is put forward by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

These men, however, fail to go very deeply into questions of life and the conditions of life. The major influence of their work is its belief in a progress which is inherent in events and works itself out in them automatically.

Ethical utilitarianism with the rise of socialism loses in importance. From what can be accomplished in the world by an "ethical temper,"<sup>80</sup> the masses begin to center their hopes on what is reached when free reign is secured for the laws of progress assured to be inherent in things. But among the intellectuals, ethical idealism as an influential disposition to reform is still maintained and in competition with socialism a vigorous reform movement follows. This movement

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 162.



is led by Friedrich Albert Lange, Bishop Ketteler, Friedrich Denison Maurice, Charles Kingsley and Count Leo Tolstoi. However, such an "ethical temper" becomes less and less appreciated and in the mentality of the masses the belief in progress, separated from ethics, has become mechanistic.

The two most important ethical thinkers of the nineteenth century, Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche, prove no help for the age in its need for a social ethics which is also a true ethics. Their sole concern is with individualist ethics from which no social ethics can spring, and so they fail to stem the general deterioration in the world-view.

About 1860, when speculative philosophy had definitely become bankrupt and the unsatisfactory nature of the ethics of popular utilitarianism, as also that of Kant's successors, was generally acknowledged, Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy began to receive a hearing. For Schopenhauer, the essence of things in themselves, which is to be accepted as underlying all phenomena, is will-to-live. The countless individualities which are rooted in the universal will-to-live seek satisfaction in self-fashioned goals in obedience to an inward impulse. However, they forever experience disappointment. Hence, he concludes that the world is meaningless and all existence suffers. Knowledge of this fact is attainable by the will-to-live in the highest creatures who have the power of remaining conscious that the totality of existence is merely a world of appearance and hence the will reaches clarity of thought about itself and about existence. It then realizes its blind urge to life-affirmation, which is within it, and its optimistic conception of



the world is of no benefit to it and finds deliverance in world- and life-negation. Ethics in his system "appears in the threefold shape":<sup>81</sup> as ethics of resignation, as ethics of universal pity and as ethics of world-renunciation.

But Schopenhauer's philosophy, while bidding man to listen to his heart, "something never yet heard of in philosophical ethics"<sup>82</sup> and extending ethics to include all creation, cannot succeed because it is only theoretical. World- and life-negation is an end in itself but this would mean the cessation of life, therefore, in practice, it makes inadmissible concessions to world- and life-affirmation.

Nietzsche criticizes the current philosophical and religious ethics on two counts. First, it is deficient in veracity because the circulated conception of good and evil spring not out of man's reflection on the meaning of his life, but have been invented to keep individuals useful to the majority, thus, in the individual, do not attain to the real inward conviction. Second, it fails to allow a human being to become a personality because current ethics would train him with no regard for the perfection of the individual, consequently, he proposes ethics

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 169.



of a higher life-affirmation. This consists in "the entire content of the will-to-live being raised to its highest conceivable power."<sup>85</sup> Men, then, fulfill the meaning of their lives by "living out of life to the full"<sup>86</sup> hence life itself is honoured and by the enhancement of life the meaning of existence is realized.

Nietzsche's one-sidedness, like Schopenhauer's, fares no better. Life-affirmation, unless it tries to understand itself in world-affirmation, can only be "enhanced life-affirmation never a higher form of it,"<sup>87</sup> but Nietzsche cannot bring himself to this task for in self-devotion to the world there follows life-negation. Further, being misled by the ethical element contained in life-affirmation into giving the status of ethics to life-affirmation as such, he falls into the absurdities which follow from one-sidedness. However, while failing to establish an ethical system that can give satisfaction, these two elemental thinkers do bring to light elemental ethical thoughts contained in mutually exclusive views and they together corroborate that the ethical consists in a mysterious combination of life-negation and life-affirmation.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, ethics finds itself in an unenviable position, but confidence in the ability to produce a satisfactory ethical system still prevailed. With the growth of science and the inward change of thought, a nature-philosophy which is

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 175.



in harmony with scientific observation of nature became the only possible philosophy, consequently, once more an attempt is made to secure a basis for ethics in nature-philosophy.

By means of psychology, biology, and sociology, one attempt is made to establish ethics "like the arch of a bridge, upon two piers":<sup>88</sup> one, the natural disposition of man, and the other, the needs of society. Among those who follow this path, Schweitzer has named Henry Sidgwick, Leslie Stephen, Samuel Alexander, Wilhelm Wundt, Friedrich Paulsen, Friedrich Jodl, Georg von Gizeyki and Harald Hoffding.

They do not succeed. In trying to combine ethical personality and the ethics of utilitarianism, they fail to inquire into their higher unity as is evidenced by the fact that the conception of the moral does not receive from them any real explanation or any deepening, as a consequence, they prove incapable of giving effective ethical impulses to the thought of their time.

This "mediating form of ethics"<sup>89</sup> is not allowed to pass unchallenged, and as widely as these challengers differ in points of detail, they represent ethics as produced through the ethical personality by stepping out of ourselves and working for the welfare of the community. Hermann Cohen showed that the ethical ego was brought into existence by the pure Will thinking out the idea of one's fellow-man and the idea of the association of men to form a State. Wilhelm

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 181.



Herrmann showed that ethics consist in individual subordination before the power of that which is universally valid in thought but that content of ethics which is a necessity of thought is reached by seeing ourselves in each other and deciding what kind of conduct makes us mutually reliable. James Martineau, T. H. Green, F. T. Bradley, Simon Laurie, James Seth and Josiah Royce show the whole of ethics originate in the need for self-perfection and they advance to a higher life-affirmation consisting in co-operative activity which the world-spirit wills for us.

None of these explanations are successful. The first two involve abstractions from which nothing can proceed and the third explanation neither puts nor explains the question why life-affirmation involves world-renunciation or self-fulfilment is attained only in self-abnegation.

Another path followed by nineteenth-century thinkers was to conceive of the ethical as self-perfecting through devotion, that is, as life-affirmation within which life-denial is present, and regard it as the last and highest manifestation of the natural will-to-live. This path is followed by Alfred Fouillée, Jean Marie Guyau, Friedrich Albert Lange and Wilhelm Stern. They regard the ethical as part of the evolutionary process, a transition of the physical into the psychic. Thus true devotion is not a surrendering of the self but a manifestation of its expansion; its perfection consists in the most complete giving out of oneself.

Their attempt is not, however, successful. They cannot convincingly show that higher life-affirmation, by a paradox which lies



in the nature of things, becomes ethical altruism. And by their philosophizing about the way in which the will-to-live is to become ethical, they are led to nature-philosophy and then attempt to become ethical; they are led to nature-philosophy and then attempt to read into the world an optimistic-ethical meaning, or at least to give an ethical character to the relation of the individual to the universe. But of considerable significance is the fact they recognize nature-philosophy may be able to justify ethics and an ethical world-view and hence proclaim in principle the sovereign independence of ethics without objective validity. They, however, do not thoroughly investigate their assumption of the existence of a conflict between world-view and life-view or proclaim with conviction the sovereign independence of the life-view over the world-view. In fact, they do not completely renounce a world-view; their confidence in an ultimate correspondence between life-view and world-view is not completely overthrown. They are still optimistic enough to believe in a nature-philosophy in which ethics has its part.

In Eduard von Hartmann there appears the exposition of yet another nature-philosophy. But it differs from the foregoing in two respects: it is pessimistic, and ethics are subordinated to it. The world process is meaningless and purposeless for ethics, hence the task of ethics is to co-operate in hastening its end. The course of ethical evolution leads to pessimistic ethics. Having arrived, in the evolutionary process at the moral principle of the development of civilization, thinking proceeds on "supra-ethical"<sup>90</sup> lines, and comes

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 194.



to grasp the notion that an unethical conception of ethics has to be developed completely so that the ethic of world- and life-negation may evolve. Hence, von Hartmann, rather than protesting against the "unethical civilization-ethics"<sup>91</sup> of the close of the nineteenth century, on the basis of his understanding of ethical progress, aids its causes.

But von Hartmann has not produced an ethical system of morals. He cannot make enhanced life-affirmation become in a natural way ethical. Nor can he tell us how and when the supra-ethical ethics of enhanced world- and life-affirmation evolves into the highest ethic of world- and life-negation, nor does he make clear in what way this highest system of ethics, in which we function as redeemers of the absolute, is to be carried out into practice. His discovery of the principle of the inherent progress in the history of morals fools the age which is living in an unethical and unspiritual optimism.

Something revolutionary now occurs in philosophical thought. Henri Bergson renounces the attempt to bring together nature-philosophy and ethics, while Houston Stewart Chamberlain and Count Hermann Keyserling make the attempt. Bergson forces intellect to come to terms with itself and take stock of its limitations. He analyzes the nature of the process of knowledge and is led out beyond the quantitative ranges of intellect to the qualitative heights of pure intuition. Chamberlain attempts to find a world-view which is based on nature-philosophy and is at the same time ethical. Keyserling would reach

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 193.



clear ideas not only about knowledge of the world, but also about life and work in the world, its importance consisting of the entry of the human spirit into reciprocal relations with the universe.

Their results are, however, disappointing. Bergson does not find it necessary to produce from his nature-philosophy a world-and life-view but limits himself to depicting it from the standpoint of "the observing subject"<sup>92</sup> and never tackles the question of the moral consciousness. He does not come, then, to the recognition that the real significance of deepened knowledge of the world is to teach us what we ought to aim at in life. Chamberlain, to reach a real civilization, would combine Goethe's nature-philosophy, which conceives becoming as an eternal being, with Kant's judgment about the nature of duty, but does not develop to completion such a world-view. Keyserling, who cannot clearly see ethics, declares truth to be the highest idea and for himself declares sincere and emphatic life-affirmation.

Among the "lesser spirits"<sup>93</sup> there is still a conviction that from the insight into the essential nature of life, into the development of lower life into higher, and into the inner connections of the individual life with the life of the universe, it can yet arrive at ethics. Some of its representatives sense the moral as becoming one with the universe. Others sense that true ethics are an enhanced and noble life-affirmation and would have nothing to do with social ethics. Still others, like

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 198.



Johannes Unold, try to bring nature-philosophy and ethics together so as to let them conceive of human activity directed to social ends as the last result of the development of the organic world. Still other scientific nature-philosophers, like Ernst Haeckel, are content to piece together out of what is regarded as moral a system of universally acceptable ethics and exalt it, as far as that is possible, into a product of nature-philosophy.

These men, then, strive to produce ethics from nature-philosophy. Their products, however, are not satisfactory.

No satisfactory ethic has been produced: the philosophy of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth advances either to a "supra-ethical world-view"<sup>94</sup> or finds itself "among ethical ruins."<sup>95</sup> There is no ethic for mankind, no discoverable purpose in life, the result being the decay of Western civilization.

The preceding history of Western thought, "the tragedy of the Western world-view,"<sup>96</sup> is the tale of the decay of Western civilization. Western thought "has sought for that outlook on life from which alone a deep and comprehensive civilization can come."<sup>97</sup> To this end, "it wanted to reach a position of world- and life-affirmation and with that as a foundation decree that it is our duty to be active, to strive for progress of all kinds, and to create values. It has wanted

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. ix.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. ix.



to reach an ethical system and on that foundation establish that for the sake of serviceable activity we have to place our life at the service of ideas and of the other life around us."<sup>98</sup> Rationalism, like late Stoicism, did attain an optimistic-ethical world-view<sup>99</sup> not by accepting the world as it is, but by conceiving the course of world events as the expression of a rational, ethical world will,<sup>100</sup> that is, "The world-accepting ethical will of man interprets according to its own nature the force that is working itself out in world events."<sup>100</sup> Western thought, however, proved incapable of grounding this "noble and valuable view,"<sup>101</sup> convincingly and permanently in thought.

What lies between that time and to-day is an intermezzo of thought, an intermezzo with extraordinarily interesting and valuable moments, but nevertheless unhappy and fatal. Its inevitable end was our sinking into a condition in which we have neither a philosophy of life nor civilization, a condition which contains in itself all that spiritual and material misery in which we languish.<sup>102</sup>

The responsibility, then, for the present crisis in civilization lies at the door of nineteenth-century philosophy. During the eighteenth century, the ethical ideals which are necessary for civilization were supported by a living, popular optimistic-ethical world-view that interpreted reality in such a way as to find meaning in it for

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. x.

<sup>99</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 156.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>102</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. xix.



human life and values, and to maintain enthusiasm for civilization. The task before philosophy was but to complete the work in elemental thinking "about ethics and attitude toward life, which was left incomplete by the eighteenth century,"<sup>103</sup> and to put into general circulation a secure philosophical view which would engender enthusiasm and activity in the advancement of civilization. Instead of that, philosophy gradually renounced her duty as "guide and guardian of the general reason,"<sup>104</sup> by becoming less and less elemental. About the middle of the nineteenth century, with the collapse of the philosophic "dogmatism"<sup>105</sup> of German speculative philosophy, the "weapon"<sup>106</sup> being the natural sciences, but a creation which, however, continued to exert some posthumous influence with the result men had no inkling of the catastrophe that was inevitably impending, philosophy became largely a science concerned merely with sifting the conclusions of the natural and historical sciences, as if accumulating them as material for some future theory of the universe which it never produced. Hence it lost the power of spontaneous and reasoned theoretical thought and almost degenerated into becoming a mere history of philosophy, instead of philosophy itself, for it abandoned its proper function of finding a true and serviceable world-view. Having nothing constructive

<sup>103</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 154.

<sup>104</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Decay and the Restoration of Civilization, p. 12.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 7.



to offer mankind, it did, however, continue to play a certain academic part in schools and universities. But even in exercising this function, it looked with disdain upon the philosophy of the past for its naiveness and upon anything in the nature of popular philosophy for its simplicity. It totally ignored the fact that the value of any philosophy is to be measured by its capacity to transform itself into a living way of thought and to guide the lives of the masses.

In still another way philosophy betrayed civilization. It did this by cherishing the view that such an optimistic and ethical world-view can be based on our interpretation of the world. The failure of pure thought to secure an optimistic and ethical world-view is not the fault of philosophy, but it is a fact which it might be expected to have recognized and admitted.

#### The Industrial and Economic Revolution as Another Cause

Although the failure of thought has been the decisive factor in the production of the decay of civilization, it has not alone been responsible. The decay of civilization is due secondly to the de-humanizing effects of the industrial and economic revolution upon the spiritual life of mankind. These act as hindrances, reducing modern man's capacity for civilization.

One hindrance to civilization is modern man's lack of freedom and of the power of mental concentration. Material and spiritual freedom are closely connected, and civilization postulates free men, for by free men alone can it be conceived and realized. But in modern man, material freedom and with it the capacity for thinking



are alike diminished. In relation to natural forces, it is true material achievements have made man freer than before, but at the same time have reduced the independence of individual existences. Increasingly more human beings, gathered into great masses, have lost their elementary freedom and have as a consequence suffered damage to their spiritual nature. And to the lack of liberty has been added the further handicap of overstrain, physical or mental, or both, so that for some generations past, many individuals have lived only as unceasing workers, not as free human beings. The consequences of overwork and over-industrialization in all levels of society is manifested in the stunting of the spiritual faculties. This process begins even in childhood because parents, inextricably absorbed in toil, have no time and no energy to devote themselves in a normal way to their children. Similarly when the child becomes a worker himself, the strain on him is such that he cannot concentrate on anything serious in his leisure time hence as a physical necessity he seeks only complete idleness or only those forms of entertainment which make the least exercise of his judgment or thought. That this want of thinking power has become a second nature in man today is shown by the fact that institutions "which ought to serve the cause of culture, and therewith of civilization"<sup>107</sup> have increasingly pandered to this lowered intellectual standard and by the fact that in social life, conversation is usually confined to generalities and as a rule nothing original is given out or expected. This has all resulted in a generally lowered conception of

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 19.



what modern man might be.

Yet another hindrance to civilization in modern man is his one-sidedness and therefore his incompleteness as an individual. The enormous increase in knowledge has involved specialization, so that not the whole man, but only one aspect of his capacity is brought into play. Hence his other creative capacities and his artistic instincts are atrophied for want of use. Nowhere is the defect from excessive specialization so evident as in science, and this in turn has unfortunate repercussions on education; teachers fail to make their pupils understand the proper correlation of one branch of knowledge with another. And in every direction, even when it could be dispensed with, excessive organization, with its rules and regulations, necessarily restricts the scope of individual initiative, thus, for example, the elementary school teacher is in many countries far less free than he used to be and his teaching is, as a result, often "lifeless and impersonal."<sup>108</sup>

Another hindrance to civilization is the danger of modern man's loss of his humanity, his power of personal response to his fellows. As a result of the hurry, overcrowding and overstrain, modern man meets his fellow-men as strangers, no longer realizing how "unnatural" that is. When we cease to be conscious that every human being concerns us just because he is our fellow-human, then the foundation of civilization and ethics are beginning to be undermined. For the past two generations, however, there has developed a social mentality which estranges individuals from natural human feeling. The

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 23.



"standoffishness" and lack of interest and sympathy are regarded, not as rudeness, nor even as unnatural, but as correct behaviour. The human worth and human dignity of all men, from being overlooked, ceases to be recognized not as men, but only as "raw material"<sup>109</sup> for certain ends. The light-hearted manner, for instance, in which people had gradually come to talk of war and conquest showed that they had no more regard for the welfare of individuals than they would have if war were only a game of chess. Similarly, in regard to coloured races, in recent decades, men have sometimes written and spoken publicly in terms which suggested that they were hardly human at all. Again in modern education, the duty of humanity, "the first thing necessary in the training of personality,"<sup>110</sup> now receives but scant attention.

Yet, another hindrance to civilization is the over-organization of public life. Personalities and ideas are subordinated to institutions whereas the converse should be the case. Our spiritual and mental life now runs its course within organization and from early childhood, man learns to think with his group. While in the eighteenth century, ideas had to be justified by the individual reason, consideration now is given only to the views which prevail in organized social groups. Hence the individual tends to take it for granted that organizational views are beyond criticism, and he thus becomes so lost in the mentality of the mass that he almost ceases to lead an independent

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 26.



mental existence. Yet, he is quite unconscious that his abnormal susceptibility to group influence is a weakness, for he thinks that by action in combination with others he is helping to guard the greatness of modern man. It is largely because the majority have in this way renounced the rights of thinking for themselves, and are guided only by the opinion of their groups, that freedom of thought has to so great an extent gone out of use and the process of spreading opinions which have no foundation in thought is constantly intensified and applauded. But, in so far as independent thought was abandoned, faith in truth was inevitably lost for when man surrenders his personal opinion, he surrenders his personal moral judgment. Any misgivings he may feel are suppressed in order that he may agree with the mass of his fellows as to what is good and what is bad. Thus, he acquires a power of making excuses for all that is meaningless, cruel, unjust or bad in the conduct of his group or nation. Public opinion helps him in this by disseminating the theory that the actions of the community are to be measured by the standards of expediency than by those of morality.

#### Christianity as a Further Factor

It is significant that Albert Schweitzer believes that religion has been ineffective in halting the decay of civilization and is itself a major cause of the decay of Western civilization. In 1934, when he lectured at Oxford on the subject, "Religion in Modern Civilization," he premised his approach with the claim that religion is no longer a force in civilization. The spirit of idealism has given way to the



spirit of practical realism, having lost the force that it had in the age of Rationalism. As a consequence, religion proved powerless to prevent the war that came to the world in 1914 and even "joined forces with the spirit of the world," defeating itself as is evidenced by the fact that religion is today almost totally powerless.

To compensate for this, we are told in Out of My Life and Thought it sought external power, further weakening its already weakened position.

To make up to itself for the fact that it does so little to prove the reality of its spiritual and ethical nature, the Christianity of today cheats itself with the delusion that it is making its position as a Church stronger year by year. It is accommodating itself to the spirit of the age by adopting a kind of modern worldliness. Like other organized bodies it is at work to make good, by even stronger and more uniform organization, its claim to be a body justified by history and practical success. But just in proportion as it gains in external power, it loses in spiritual.<sup>111</sup>

How is it that religion came to be in this position? This question is answered in "Religion in Modern Civilization." Its basic lack was the failure to emphasize the truth that is its essence. It adapted itself to the spirit of philosophy by trying to discover its truth in the external world. But, just as in the case of philosophy, the religious explanation of the world does not provide an ethic with power, it, too, failed to follow the path of elemental thought and hence could neither produce nor sustain the kind of ethic that was needed. Hence, religion failed to halt the decay of civilization, in fact, its decay proved a part of the decay, and therefore contributed to the disintegration.

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<sup>111</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 184.



This raises the question as to what Schweitzer sees as the nature of religion. This aspect of his thought is contained in his book Christianity and the Religions of the World. Here he deals with Christianity, Brahmanism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and the religious side of Chinese thought.

In dealing with Christianity, Schweitzer still insists that Christianity originated with Christ and not the Graeco-Oriental mystery religions, and that it possesses a vital ethical dynamic. He argues in the Graeco-Oriental mystery-religions, like Christianity, the assurance of redemption plays a part, however, unlike Christianity, it is not an exclusive concern for the former knew nothing of the conception of the Kingdom of God whereas the latter is dominated by that conception, a conception created by the Jewish prophets Amos and Isaiah. Late Judaism, probably due to the influence of Zarathustrian ideas, developed this conception in "fantastic ways," Jesus bringing "the Kingdom-idea to its ethical perfection, without inveighing against its late-Jewish form."<sup>112</sup> Later, when the eschatological hope had to be relinquished, Jewish thought is abandoned and Christianity is Hellenised, the consequence being "the ideas which constitute the uniqueness and greatness of the teaching of Jesus--the idea of the Kingdom of God and of an ethic directed toward that Kingdom--lose their vitality in the Christian religion."<sup>113</sup> But in so far as

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<sup>112</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Christianity and the Religions of the World, London: Allen and Unwin, 1923, p. 24.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 25.



Christianity is also a religion of the Kingdom of God, unlike the Graeco-Oriental mystery-religions, it is optimistic, and would wish and hope for a transformation of the world. Its ethic, then, is quite different: the ethic of the Graeco-Oriental mystery-religions is concerned only with the liberation from the world whereas Jesus, like the prophets and like Zarathustra, demands that man should free himself from the world, and at the same time be active in the world, that is be gripped by God's will of love and carry out His will in this world until transplanted into another, more perfect world. The Graeco-Oriental mystery-religions, however, have no such living conception of God, for God is to it nothing but pure spirituality, whereas the God of Jesus is an active God, who works in man: "He is a dynamic Power for good, a mysterious Will, distinct from the world and superior to the world. To Him we yield our will; to Him we leave the fate of the world."<sup>114</sup> The religious philosophy of Jesus is thus not unified: "In the contrast between world and God, who is an ethical Personality, and in the peculiar tension between pessimism and optimism lies the uniqueness of the religion of Jesus. The fact that it is not a unified system constitutes its greatness, its truth, its depth, its strength."<sup>115</sup>

In setting Christianity over against other world religions, Schweitzer sees it unnecessary to compare Christianity with the

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 29.



religion of Zarathustra, Islam or of Israel. The first of these he sees as having a great affinity with the Jewish religion and Christianity itself. For Zarathustra, the world was under the sway of Angromainya, lord of the evil spirits, whose opponent was Ahura-Mazda, chief of good spirits, preserver of life and one who demands purity. By the latter, the world will be transformed into a more perfect world and men must decide in the battle in progress which side they are on. For Schweitzer, the religion of Islam "lacks spiritual originality and is not a religion with profound thoughts on God and on the world."<sup>116</sup> The religion of Israel, he sees, as having, in its most vital ideas, been taken over by Christianity and there further developed.

However, he does see the necessity of setting Christianity over against Brahmanism, Buddhism, Hinduism and the Chinese religions. Brahmanism and Buddhism, unlike the pessimism of Jesus which relates only to external relationships, are together characterized as pessimistic and monistic. They separate spirituality and morality and their doctrine of redemption is open not to everyone but those alone who are in a position to live out this religion of withdrawal from the world. Their ethics, consumed by intellectualism, is an ethic of words but not of deeds. By comparison, however, with Christianity, it does point out the weaknesses of the modern Christian piety, that is in imagining that Christianity is merely activity, ignoring inwardness, recollectedness, a sufficient preoccupation with our own spiritual life. His conclusions, however, of these religions is not favourable.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 34.



Brahmanism and Buddhism make an impression because they represent a type of religion that is unified in itself, being the result of consistent reasoning on the world and on life. They present a logical, monistic-pessimistic view of the world and life. But it is a poverty-striken religion. Its God is mere empty spirituality. Its last word to man is absolute negation of life and of the world. Its ethical conduct is meagre. It is a mysticism which makes man lose his individual existence in a god that is dead.<sup>117</sup>

Schweitzer characterizes the Chinese religious thinking as monistic-optimistic. For its leading thinkers, the forces at work in the world are good, therefore, in their opinion, true piety consists in coming to understand the meaning of the world and in acting in accordance with it. As consistent monistic thinkers, they, too, do not attain to the conception of a personal God. For them, God is the mere totality of the forces at work in the world, a power they call "Heaven." Such a religious philosophy of Nature is found in the teachings of Lao Tsz. For him, to think and live according to the meaning of existence and in harmony with Heaven means to become like the forces of Nature, which are characterized as working in unobtrusive, unselfish ways, and not appearing to be busy outwardly, but solely in inward strength. Kung Tsz, Meng Tsz and Meh Tsz go further than this. They try to find more active goodness in the doings of "Heaven" and add active love to the ideal of piety. This "illusion" that the essence of the religion of love is knowledge of the world, however, was opposed by the greatest of Lao Tsz's disciples, Chwant Tsz, who rejected all enthusiastic ethics of love, and, like Lao Tsz, preached a conduct in accordance with the meaning of the world, that is, a "quiet mysticism

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 51.



illuminated by a mild ethic."<sup>118</sup> The failure of the religion of China is that "it attempts to be unified, self-contained, logical knowledge of the world"<sup>119</sup> but in so far as they are confronted with reality, "they must turn the wick of the lamp of ethics down, till in the end it is reduced to a dimly burning light."<sup>120</sup>

Hinduism is characterized as "a religion of compromise"<sup>121</sup> and not an ethical religion. It is a polytheism, yet would become ethical monotheism by the elevation of one of the chief gods, however, monotheism is forever in danger of being "dragged down" and of being "crushed" by polytheism. The "idealized" Hinduism, that is ethical monotheism, is a combination of theism and pantheism for it holds God to be not only the ground of the world's existence but as a Being that loves the world, a knowledge obtained by contemplation of the world. Now, while it holds religion ultimately "to be a sinking into God and a dying in God, it tries at the same time to regard this merging into the Diety as loving surrender to Him."<sup>122</sup> Thus, Hinduism is moved by ethical ideas and endeavours to become a religion of action but its attempts cannot succeed for that would require a break with its

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 64.



Polytheism and the replacement of Brahmanic philosophy by another. By its failure, then, to think out the idea of an ethical God resolutely, it "falls from ethical religion back into the unethical, or rather, it claims to be a religion beyond ethics."<sup>123</sup>

What then does Schweitzer see as the nature of religion? For him, "All questions of religion tend toward the one which comprises them all: How can I conceive myself as being in the world, and at the same time in God?"<sup>124</sup> In response, every faith must seek either to explain the world on the basis of appearances or reasonableness, and so find itself unable to produce an ethic with power, or go beyond that to an elemental thought that provides such an ethic but cannot give a complete and full rational explanation. Of these two alternatives, Schweitzer holds true that Christianity has chosen the latter as being of higher value. For it, the answer to this ultimate question of religion is found in the Gospel of Jesus: "By living and working in the world as one who is not of the world."<sup>125</sup> It is a path of naivete but a counselled naivete. It holds God to be the sum-total of the forces at work in the world, as well, God is apprehended as Will that is distinct from the world and would compel us not to conform to the world. Christianity "carries within itself unresolved, the antinomy

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 74.



between monism and dualism, between logical and ethical religion."<sup>126</sup>

As well, however, Christianity does not definitely choose between pessimism and optimism: it is pessimistic in its realization that "perfection, pain and sorrow are essential features of the natural world,"<sup>127</sup> and also "in man it finds a will which does not answer to the will of the ethical God and which, therefore, is evil";<sup>128</sup> it is optimistic in that the world is not abandoned for man is assigned a place in the world and commanded to live in it and work in the spirit of the ethical God, and further, by the assurance given him by Christianity, without an explanation how, that God's purpose for the world and man is being fulfilled. As this thought is expressed in a magnificent simile,

There is an ocean--cold water without motion. In this ocean, however, is the Gulf Stream, hot water, flowing from the Equator toward the Pole. Inquire of all scientists how it is physically imaginable that a stream of hot water flows between the waters of the ocean, which, so to speak, form its banks, the moving within the motionless, the hot within the cold: no scientist can explain it. Similarly, there is the God of love within the God of the forces of the universe--one with Him, and yet so totally different. We let ourselves be seized and carried away by that vital stream.<sup>129</sup>

This mystery, Christianity has sought to explain as much as possible. The first Christians anticipated God and the world

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 129.



harmonized and a life in the world peacefully congruous with existence in God as the result of a speedy transformation of the natural world into the perfect world of the Kingdom of God. Their hope, however, was not fulfilled. Thereafter, thinking has endeavoured "to make Christianity a doctrine in which the activity of the ethical God and the course of events in the natural world are brought into harmony with each other" but reality has always undermined the theories that were advanced. This development, however, a development from "naive naivete into the region of profound naivete"<sup>130</sup> reveals what constitutes its real nature. Our life and its direction are to be determined solely by allowing ourselves to be gripped by the ethical God who reveals Himself in us, and by our yielding our will to His. Christianity, alone, is ethical mysticism.

And this is the Gospel of Jesus. But modern man has interpreted the thought of Jesus differently. Since the idea that by active ethical conduct of individuals the Kingdom of God may be realized on earth is familiar to modern man, it was assumed that Jesus, who speaks of ethical activity and also of the Kingdom of God, connected the two. But Jesus did no such thing. For Jesus, the Kingdom of God is brought about by God when the imperfect world is transformed by Him into a perfect world. Man's ethical activity is only like a powerful prayer to God that He may cause the Kingdom to appear without delay. And there is a deep significance that Jesus did not establish a connection for it "signifies that we are to be ethical, not in

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 79.



the expectation of thereby fulfilling some purpose but from inward necessity, so as to be children of God's Spirit and in this world already to enter into His will."<sup>131</sup> Thus, he attains to an absolute ethic of "not being conformed to this world,"<sup>132</sup> but of "having to do God's will--becoming forces of God's ethical personality."<sup>133</sup>

### The Possibility of the Rebirth of Civilization

In The Decay and the Restoration of Civilization Schweitzer explicitly rejects the theory that the decay of civilization is something quite normal, that the symptoms of decay are symptoms of its senility which, like any natural process of growth, eventually culminates in its expiration and is, as it were, by its seeds, replaced with a new civilization. In the meantime, the task before us is to simply record "the unedifying phenomena of its senility, which testify to the gradual loss of the ethical character of civilization."<sup>134</sup> This theory, however, is held to be irresponsible: "There are, in fact, no peoples to be seen whom one could imagine to be capable of even a portion of such a task. All the peoples of the earth have been in large measure under the influence of our civilization and of our lack of it, so that they more or less share our fate. Among none of them are to be found thoughts

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>134</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Decay and the Restoration of Civilization, p. 62.



which can lead to any considerable original movement of civilization."<sup>135</sup> But further, "It is not the civilization of a race, but that of mankind, present and future alike, that we must give up as lost if belief in a rebirth of our civilization is a vain thing."<sup>136</sup>

However, in spite of Schweitzer's pessimism regarding the situation in which mankind finds himself at present, Schweitzer is confident that rebirth of civilization is yet possible. He reasons that if the ethical is the essential element in civilization, decadence gives way to rebirth when ethical activities begin to work in our conviction and in the ideas which we undertake to stamp upon reality. But the difficulties besetting this task are such that "only the strongest faith in the power of the ethical spirit will let us venture on it."<sup>137</sup>

The first and foremost difficulty is "the inability of our generation to understand what is and must be."<sup>138</sup> Thus the present age must take stock of itself: it must draw courage, like the men of the Renaissance "to desire the renewal of the world through ideas from their conviction of the absolute indefensibility of the material and spiritual conditions under which they lived."<sup>139</sup> This involves overcoming the unthinking optimism of the masses along with the equally

<sup>135</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 1.

<sup>136</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Decay and the Restoration of Civilization, p. 64.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 65.



unthinking pessimism which refuses to believe in the possibility of spiritual progress.

A second difficulty besetting this task is that we can no longer look to anything external to aid us. The effort must come wholly from within. From the Renaissance to the middle of the nineteenth century, the work of civilization toward spiritual progress was aided by achievements in the realm of science. Knowledge and thought were allies, and both looked with reverence to the sovereignty of reason. Now, however, we have none of the natural external aids we formerly had.

We, who have lived to see the spiritual bankruptcy of all the institutions which they have created, can no longer work in this way simultaneously at the reform of institutions and the revival of the spiritual element. The help which such co-operation would give us is denied us. We cannot even reckon any longer on the old co-operation between knowledge and thought. . . . Today thought gets no help from science, and the latter stands facing it independent and unconcerned. . . . Once every man of science was also a thinker who counted for something in the general spiritual life of his generation. Our age has discovered how to divorce knowledge from thought, with the result that we have, indeed, a science which is free, but hardly any science left which reflects.<sup>140</sup>

Another difficulty in the way of the regeneration of civilization is presented by the fact that the effort must be purely individual, for after all it is only in individuals that the ethical can ever come into existence: "The final decision as to what the future of a society shall be depends not on how near its organization is to perfection, but on the degrees of worthiness in its individual members."<sup>141</sup> It is

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., pp. 71-72.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 73.



then, this latter factor, although unobtrusive, which has been responsible for inaugurating all the great movements, all the great reforms of the past. This is one of the reasons why the history of the past is so difficult for us to understand. We see it in the main only as a record of a series of reactions to external happenings, but what preceded these and caused them, namely, the inward disposition of individuals, is for the most part concealed from us. So, too, it will be with the history of the future: "One thing, however, is clear. Where the collective body works more strongly on the individual than the latter does upon it, the result is deterioration."<sup>142</sup>

Another difficulty in the renewal of civilization is the fact that the work which lies before us "is a piece of reconstruction."<sup>143</sup> The reasoned ethical ideas of civilization which the age requires are no stranger to it; they have already been in mankind's possession "and are to be found in many an antiquated formula."<sup>144</sup> The task before the age is to restore them to their ascendancy and bring them into relation with reality. The history of civilization holds out little hope for this undertaking. Yet, only what has been, not what will be, can be inferred from the history of the past. Should it be proven that no people have witnessed a decay of its civilization and a rebirth, what has yet never been accomplished, must be with us, consequently, we cannot content ourselves to accept the fact that reasoned ethical ideals

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 66.



on which civilization rest get worn out: "We want to get into our hands the key of the secret, so that we may with it unlock the new age, the age in which the worn out becomes again unworn and the spiritual and ethical can no longer get worn out."<sup>145</sup> The decisive answer, then, why deserving thoughts on account of their content lose the evidential force of their moral and rational character and pass as mere phrases, that is, get worn out, is that thought has failed to establish the ethical and optimistic element on a sufficiently firm foundation.

With such difficulties, then, and against the background of forces which would suppress the freedom of the spirit, the tasks that the spirit has to take in hand are indeed heavy. The recognition, however, that civilization is founded on world-view and that it can spring only from a spiritual awakening and the ethical will of the masses, make apparent the difficulties in the way of attaining it, but at the same time this recognition clears the undertaking from all considerations of possibility or impossibility.

### The Great Task Facing Mankind

The greatest task of the human spirit is to create a strong and worthy Weltanschauung:<sup>146</sup> "The reconstruction of our age, then,

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>146</sup> In English versions, "Weltanschauung" is variously translated as "world-view," "view of the world," "theory of the universe," and "conception of the universe." Normally, "Weltanschauung" would include one's interpretation of the structure of the universe defining one's conception of human life, excluding one's interpretation of personal existence. However, Schweitzer repudiates this conventional meaning. For Schweitzer, "Lebensanschauung," life-view, is prior to world-view and provides by illuminating the relationship of the individual man to Cosmic Reality a limited world-view.



can begin only with a reconstruction of its theory of the universe,"<sup>147</sup> On this the future of civilization depends.

In order to create civilization anew, it must fulfill certain conditions. First, it must be the product of thought, of reason, for it is only when it has been "turned over in the thought of the many,"<sup>148</sup> and recognized as truth that it can attain to the force of communicable and lasting conviction. The principle, established by the period historically designated as the rationalist, that world-view must be based on thought and thought alone is forever valid. Its incomplete and unsatisfactory intellectual productions were not the fault of its principle but that it was not, with the means at its disposal, able to probe deeply enough. What must be done is to follow this principle and "to think out to the end a theory of the universe which has been produced by thought."<sup>149</sup> But reason is "no dry intellectualism,"<sup>150</sup> but "the totality of all the functions of our spirit in their living action and interaction. In it intellect and our will hold that mysterious intercourse which determines the character of our being. The ideas about the world which it produces contain all that we can feel or imagine about our destiny and that of mankind, and give our whole being its

<sup>147</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Decay and the Restoration of Civilization, p. 85.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 88.



direction and value."<sup>151</sup> With this, Schweitzer has cut himself loose from the rationalism of the past, for if reason is to comprehend life, understanding must ultimately pass into "thinking experience."<sup>152</sup> Only in this way can reason arrive at a profound and firmly based world-view. Thought thought out to its conclusion "leads somewhere and somehow to a living mysticism, which is for all men everywhere a necessary element of thought."<sup>153</sup>

Next, this world-view must be optimistic and ethical if the ideas and convictions of true civilization are to find in it a foundation based on a sound system of ethics. An optimistic world-view is one "which gives existence the preference as against non-existence and thus affirms life as something possessing value in itself."<sup>154</sup> From this will come the impulse to raise life, in so far as we can influence it, to its highest value. Every kind of social and scientific activity will be involved. When the outlook on life is pessimistic, ethics, "the activity of man directed to secure the inner perfection of his own personality,"<sup>155</sup> expands beyond the self-perfected of the individual

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p. 94.



because there is confidence that the world-process has somehow or other a spiritual and purposeful aim, and that the improvement of the general relations of the world and of society promotes the spiritual and moral perfecting of individuals. It is the interaction of ethics with an optimistic outlook on life that produces civilization.

Just as the world- and life-affirming, that is to say, the optimistic philosophy of life, is alone capable of stirring men to effort aimed at promoting civilization, so in an ethical world-view alone is there latent the power to make men, after renouncing altogether their selfish interests, persevere in such effort, and to keep them always bent on the spiritual and moral perfecting of the individual as the essential object of civilization. Bound the one to the other, then, world- and life-affirming world-view and ethics think out in harmony the ideals of true, complete civilization and set to work at realizing them.<sup>156</sup>

This, then, is the great task besetting mankind. Civilization awaits those who would take up the challenge.

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<sup>156</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 8.



## CHAPTER V

### SCHWEITZER'S SOLUTION FOR THE RESTORATION OF CIVILIZATION

The restoration of civilization must begin with the achieving of an optimistic-ethical world-view which is a product of thought. In Schweitzer's opinion centuries of thinkers have attempted this, but, as yet, have not been successful. What is involved is reaching answers on two questions: can profound thought arrive at world- and life-affirmation, and can profound thought lead us to ethics? In search of answers to these questions, Schweitzer drew upon the history of previous thought and freely admits his indebtedness to them.<sup>1</sup>

#### World- and Life-Affirmation Secured by Elemental Thought

Can profound thought arrive at world- and life-affirmation? Hitherto, Western thinkers have not been able to establish this because diverging from their true course, they sought to interpret man's life in terms of the universe instead of in terms of life. In Schweitzer's own words,

It has consisted simply in interpreting the world in the sense of world- and life-affirmation, that is to say, in attributing to the world a meaning which allowed it to conceive the aims of mankind and of individual men as having a meaning within that world. This interpretation is acted upon by all Western philosophy. A few thinkers who venture to be un-Western and resolutely allow

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<sup>1</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. xxiii.



world- and life-negation and ethics to be made subjects of discussion, are side-currents which do not affect the main course of the river.

That this process followed by Western thought consists in adopting an optimistic-ethical interpretation of the world will not be clear without further explanation, for it is, indeed, not always openly followed. . . . It is only when one has clearly grasped the fact that Western thought has nothing else in mind than to establish for itself a world-view based on world- and life-affirmation and ethical in character, that one can realize how in its theory of knowledge, in its metaphysics, and in all its movements generally in the game of life, it is guided, consciously or unconsciously, by the effort to interpret the world in some way or other, and in some measure, in the sense of world- and life-affirmation and ethics. Whether in this attempt it goes to work openly or secretly, skillfully or unskillfully, honourably or craftily, does not matter. Western thought needs this interpretation in order that it may be able to give a meaning to human life. Its view of life is to be a result of its view of the world. It has never considered any other course.<sup>2</sup>

But this approach is futile since our knowledge of the world gives no ground for belief that the universe is working purposefully toward any co-ordinated, definite end whatsoever, much less toward the same end for which mankind is striving. Schweitzer writes:

The hopelessness of the attempt to find the meaning of life within the meaning of the universe is shown first of all by the fact that in the course of nature there is no purposiveness to be seen in which the activities of men, and of mankind as a whole, could in any way intervene. On one of the smaller among the millions of heavenly bodies there have lived for a short space of time human beings. For how long they will continue so to live? Any lowering or raising of the temperature of the earth, any change in the inclination of the axis of their planet, a rise in the level of the ocean, or a change in the composition of the atmosphere, can put an end to their existence. Or the earth itself may fall, as so many other heavenly bodies have fallen, a victim of some cosmic catastrophe. We are entirely ignorant of what significance we have for the earth. How much less then may we presume to try to attribute to the infinite universe a meaning which has us for its object, or which can be explained in terms of our existence!

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. xii.



It is not, however, the huge disproportion between the universe and man which makes it impossible for us to give the aims and objects of mankind a logical place in those of the universe. Any such attempt is made useless beforehand by the fact that we fail to succeed in discovering any general purposiveness in the course of nature. Whatever we do find of purposiveness in the world is never anything but an isolated instance.

In the production and maintenance of some definite form of life, nature does sometimes act purposively in a magnificent way. But in no way does she ever seem intent on uniting these instances of purposiveness which are directed to single objects into a collective purpose. She never undertakes to let life coalesce with life to form a collective life. She is wonderfully creative force, and at the same time senselessly destructive force. We face her absolutely perplexed. What is full of meaning within the meaningless, the meaningless within what is full of meaning: that is the essential nature of the universe.<sup>3</sup>

This conclusion is again stated in an essay entitled, "The Ethics of Reverence for Life."

Indeed, when we consider the immensity of the universe, we must confess that man is insignificant. The world began, as it were, yesterday. It may end tomorrow. Life has existed in the universe but a brief second. And certainly man's life can hardly be considered the goal of the universe. Its margin of existence is always precarious. Study of the geological periods show that. So does the battle against disease. When one has seen whole populations annihilated by sleeping sickness, as I have, one ceases to imagine that human life is nature's goal. In fact, the Creative Force does not concern itself about preserving life. It simultaneously creates and destroys.<sup>4</sup>

Again, in Indian Thought and its Development:

The activity of the World-Spirit is a riddle to us because it runs its course in creation and in devastation, in bringing forth and in destroying life. What happens in Nature therefore cannot enable us to deduce the principle for an activity by which we can step out of an existence for ourselves alone in order to influence the world in the sense of the World-Spirit. So that for us there

<sup>3</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 204.

<sup>4</sup> Clarke, Henry, "The Ethics of Reverence for Life," The Philosophy of Albert Schweitzer, London: Methuen and Co., 1962, p. 181.



can really be no question of activity in co-operation with the Spirit of the Universe, but only of devoting ourselves to an activity through which we may experience spiritual union with that Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

And finally, in his last book, The Teaching of Reverence for Life:

However, a philosophy that proceeds from truth has to confess that no spirit of loving-kindness is at work in the phenomenal world. The universe provides us with a dreary spectacle of manifestations of the will to live continually opposed to each other. One life preserves itself by fighting and destroying other lives. The world is horror in splendor, meaninglessness in meaning, sorrow in joy.<sup>6</sup>

Schweitzer is uncompromising in his intellectual agnosticism, yet does not renounce belief in world- and life-affirmation and ethics, and in this believes himself the first among Western thinkers to attain to such a pessimistic result of knowledge without doing so.

As this is expressed by Schweitzer,

I believe I am the first among Western thinkers who has ventured to recognize the crushing result of knowledge, and the first to be absolutely skeptical about our knowledge of the world without at the same time renouncing belief in world- and life-affirmation and ethics. Resignation as to knowledge of the world is for me not an irretrievable plunge into a scepticism which leaves us to drift about in life like a derelict vessel. I see in it that effort of honesty which we may venture to make in order to arrive at the serviceable world-view which hovers within sight. Every world-view which fails to start from resignation in regard to knowledge is artificial and a mere fabrication, for it rests upon an inadmissible interpretation of the universe.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Indian Thought and its Development, London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1936, p. 259.

<sup>6</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Teaching of Reverence for Life, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Schweitzer, Civilization and Ethics, p. xv.



Recognition of the failure of thought as to knowledge of the world is not then to be seen as world-weariness, but, since it finds itself able once more to go back to life in its elemental constituent character, as an affirmation of our existence; the result is not one of sadness, but one of essential triumph over the circumstances of life. A direct and unqualified resignation can but lead to skepticism. In Schweitzer's case it does not.

Because of Schweitzer's conclusion of the failure of thought as to knowledge of the world, he bids "our search for a world-view seek to reach clear ideas about itself, and come to a halt in order to fix its attention on the thought of mankind as a whole."<sup>8</sup> Hitherto, the word "Weltanschauung" has combined world-view and life-view, that is, "Life -view prompted and world-view recited"<sup>9</sup> thus resulting in a belief that life-view was derived from world-view. But world-view and life-view are incompatible: "Our view of life is not dependent on our view of the world in the way that uncritical thought imagines. It does not wither away if it cannot send its roots down into a corresponding world-view, for it does not originate in knowledge although it would like to base itself thereon."<sup>10</sup> We must, then, surrender to the facts and this means the renunciation of "a unitary world-view which is complete in itself"<sup>11</sup> in favour of the dualism of the facts and if

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. xiv.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. xv.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 208.



these facts are accepted as facts, it must be recognized that "we understand nothing of the world, and are surrounded by complete enigmas."<sup>12</sup> We can have a life-view, that is, we can know how we are meant to live, and we can have a world-view, not through a knowledge of the world but through an experiencing of the world we come into relationship with it.

As a consequence of the recognition of the failure of thought as to knowledge of the world, Schweitzer turns to an "elemental philosophizing."<sup>13</sup> Elemental thought is regarded by Schweitzer as thought "which starts from the fundamental questions about the relations of man to the universe, about the meaning of life, and about the nature of goodness."<sup>14</sup> Such thinking he believes, has been rendered impossible throughout the history of Western philosophy because of Western man's erroneous assumption that an intelligent purposive meaning must be attributed to the universe as a whole before the meaning or meaningfulness of human life could be established. However, such thinking, he holds, can do two things: "it must lead us from mere ethical impulses to an ethic which is a necessity of thought."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>14</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 174.

<sup>15</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 209.



By elemental thought, then, one is lead to deepened world- and life-affirmation. The immediate fact of consciousness is the "will-to-live."<sup>16</sup> This is the one essential thing we know about ourselves. Life, then, begins in simple world- and life-affirmation. In order, however, to bring to their highest value our own lives and all kinds of lives that we can influence, we must advance from the elementary fact of consciousness to a new and profound form of world- and life-affirmation. This will bid us not withdraw into ourselves, although by doing so we might enjoy rest, but to take a living, active interest in all that happens around us, although by doing this we shall be involved in a state of constant unrest.

When thought awakens, however, all kinds of problems arise, and with these the picture presented to serious reflection presses on the mind with increasingly disturbing force, that is, that life promises more than it fulfills. Schweitzer puts it thus:

Life attracts us, they say, with a thousand expectations, and fulfills hardly one of them. And the fulfilled expectation is almost a disappointment, for only anticipated pleasure is really pleasure; in pleasure which is fulfilled its opposite is already stirring. Unrest, disappointment and pain are our lot in the short span of time which lies between our entrance on life and our departure from it. What is spiritual is in a dreadful state of dependence on our bodily nature. Our existence is at the mercy of meaningless happenings and can be brought to an end by them at any moment. The will-to-live gives me an impulse to action, but the action is just as if I wanted to plough the sea, sow in the furrows. What did those who worked before me effect? What significance in the endless chain of world-happenings have their efforts had? With all its illusive promises, the will-to-live only means to mislead me into prolonging my existence, and allowing to enter on existence other beings to whom the same miserable lot has been

<sup>16</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 125.



assigned as to myself, so that the game may go on and without end.<sup>17</sup>

The resulting doubt and pessimism has caused every thinking being at some time to question whether life is worth living, to familiarize himself with the thought of suicide, though he does not allow others to suspect this, and rejects the thought from a feeling of instinctive repulsion because the will-to-live is stronger than this pessimistic impulse: "An instinctive reverence for life is within us, for we are will-to-live..."<sup>18</sup> Thus, even the logical pessimism of Brahmanism and Buddhism rejects it. Pessimism is always inconsistent. Where, however, the profounder mentality of world- and life-affirmation is not reached, the will-to-live is depreciated and loses force for the tasks of practical life. Enough energy may be left to go on living, but not to overcome pessimism, so that men subsist miserably on a little bit of happiness and many vain thoughts. Yet, even so, their will-to-live often assists itself and becomes a kind of intoxication.

Spring sunshine, trees in flower, passing clouds, fields of waving corn provoke it. A will-to-live which announces itself in many forms in magnificent phenomena all around them, carries their own will-to-live along with it. Full of delight, they want to take part in the mighty symphony they hear. They find the world beautiful. ... But the transport passes. Horrid discords allow them once more to hear only noise, where they thought they perceived music. The beauty of nature is darkened by the suffering which they discover everywhere within it. Now they see once more that they are drifting like shipwrecked men over a waste of waters, ...<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 209.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 212.



The will-to-live, however, is not limited in its support to knowledge of the external universe, "a knowledge from outside, and remains for ever incomplete."<sup>20</sup> It may find its means of subsistence within itself, a knowledge which "is direct, and takes me back to the mysterious movements of life as it is in itself,"<sup>21</sup> and the ideas that are given with it should be accepted as a higher and decisive kind of knowledge. Its essential nature is to resolve to live to the full and to realize the highest possible perfection. In all nature, there is seen this impulse, this striving after perfection.

In the flowering tree, in the strange forms of the medusa, in the blade of grass, in the crystal; everywhere it strives to reach the perfection with which it is endowed. In everything that exists there is at work an imaginative force, which is determined by ideals.<sup>22</sup>

This is part of our own nature, and we ought to obey it in conformity with the will-to-live that is in us: "How this striving originated within us, and how it has developed, we do not know, but it is given with our existence. We must act upon it, if we would not be unfaithful to the mysterious will-to-live which is within us."<sup>23</sup> To be true to it, to allow it to develop to complete vitality, is what will determine the fate of our existence. Through world- and life-affirmation, our will-to-live joins in pursuing the aims of the mysterious, universal will-to-

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 214.



live of which we ourselves are a manifestation, thus we give our existence meaning from within which is correlated with outward phenomenon. In other words, in deepened world- and life-affirmation, "reverence for life" is manifested: "All living piety flows from reverence for life and the compulsion towards ideals which is given in it. . . . It is a piety which comes from inward necessity, and therefore asks no questions about ends to be pursued."<sup>24</sup>

But all of this does not lead to an easy-going, happy condition of confirmed optimism. The struggle between optimism and pessimism constantly goes on within us. It goes on all through our lives, and accordingly we have to be on guard ourselves against allowing any deterioration in our will-to-live. We must realize that happiness and success do not depend on anything outside our own being, and our will-to-live must seek to attain to the quiet triumph of true resignation, which at the hour of its greatest need it can achieve over the circumstances of life.

#### Ethics Secured By Elemental Thought

Profound thought which goes deep enough does, as we have seen, bring us to an attitude of world- and life-affirmation. Can it lead us to ethics? According to Schweitzer, in general, we learn from the history of ethics "that the object of ethical enquiry is the discovery of the universal basic principle of the moral,"<sup>25</sup> that is, that which

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 217.



"must be recognized as a necessity of thought and must bring man to an unceasing, living, and practical conflict and understanding with reality."<sup>26</sup> Hitherto, the basic principles of the moral offered are not satisfactory for they cannot be thought out to a conclusion without leading to paradoxes or losing in ethical content.

Three general methods which have been employed in the attempt to understand ethics are identified by Schweitzer: to conceive ethics as effort to procure rational pleasure; to conceive ethics as devotion to one's neighbor and to society; to conceive ethics as effort for self-perfecting. The thought of antiquity, "classical thought," tried to understand the ethical as that which brought rational pleasure. Starting from this standpoint, however, it failed to succeed in arriving at an ethic of active self-devotion, and it ended in an "ethically-coloured resignation."<sup>27</sup>

Modern ethical thought is from the outset social utilitarian, taking it for granted that the individual shall in every respect devote himself to the welfare of other individuals and the welfare of the community. But when modern thought endeavours to think out this ethic and give it a secure foundation, it is forced to the most inconsistent conclusions, and finally it can only explain the ethic of self-devotion or altruism as being based primarily on a wonderfully-developed herd mentality.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 217.



A third attempt to understand ethics is to explain morality as a striving for the realization or perfecting of the individual self. This explanation, however, fails to establish the basic principle of the moral so as to give it a content which is ethically satisfying.

Schweitzer dismisses the first method because "it does not sufficiently take into account the enigma of self-sacrifice, and can never solve it."<sup>28</sup> He considers seriously only the remaining two contrasted attempts at explanation, the one starting from self-devotion as the recognized content of ethics, whilst the other starts from the self-perfection of the individual, and tries to understand self-devotion as a necessary constituent of these two. What is needed, he concluded, is a synthesis of these two: is it not possible that self-devotion and self-perfecting, altruism on the one hand and self-fulfillment on the other, belong together in such a way that the one is the corollary of the other? If such a combination can be achieved, the basic principle of the moral can be secured.

Such a combination, in Schweitzer's opinion, has not previously been achieved. Hitherto the ethic of self-perfection has been the loadstar of the intuitionist moralists whilst the ethic of self-devotion has been that of altruistic utilitarianism. The failure of the former is due to the fact that "it allows the spiritual inward devotion to Being to be directed to an abstract totality of Being instead of to

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 220.



real Being,"<sup>29</sup> which has resulted in the passive mysticism of resignation: "The hitherto accepted mysticism leads into the supra-ethical because it is abstract. Abstraction is the death of ethics, for ethics are a living relationship to living life."<sup>30</sup> However, unlike the ethic of self-perfection, which is "indeed fundamentally cosmic"<sup>31</sup> but hitherto not "in the right way,"<sup>32</sup> the ethic of self-devotion has to this point been too narrowly drawn. Altruistic utilitarianism has been conceived in principle, only with the devotion of man to man and man to human society. As yet, not even the first step has been taken to extend devotion to all the manifestations of life in the world.

The failure, then, of these two kinds of ethics can only be retrieved, and their apparent dualism resolved, by deep reflection upon the essential nature of them both. Self-perfection must look not only inwards, subjectively and passively, to the Source of its being, but also outwards, actively and purposefully, to all the manifestations of Being in the world of sense, in order that man may come "into his true relationship to the Being that is in him and outside him."<sup>33</sup> Self-devotion must concern itself not only with the relations of the self to his fellows and to society, but also to the whole cosmos of creation

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 231.



of which he forms a part. These are complementary attitudes to life, and their synthesis results in that practical mysticism which alone can give to thought justification for an enthusiastic and "unshakeable world-and life-affirmation"<sup>34</sup> in which, however, world-renunciation and self-denial have their part. And that practical mysticism is "devotion to life resulting from reverence for life."<sup>35</sup>

By elemental thinking, then, we are lead to world- and life-affirmation and to ethics. Both are given in our will-to-live and come to be discerned in it in proportion as it learns to think about itself and its relation to the world. And they are nothing but "reverence for life."

"Reverence for Life" arising from the Will-to-Live that has become reflective therefore contains affirmation of life and ethics inseparably combined.<sup>36</sup>

#### "Reverence for Life" Explained

What is "reverence for life" and how does it arise in us? When the fully rational man, the perfectly honest thinker, considers what he is, he acknowledges the barriers beyond which he may not venture, that is, he relinquishes a longing for complete knowledge about the universe: it is the "knowing ignorance"<sup>37</sup> of the mediaeval mystics. But skepticism concerning knowledge of the world must not

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 239.

<sup>36</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 127.

<sup>37</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Indian Thought and its Development, p. 263.



produce cynicism: an optimistic-ethical outlook on life does not depend upon an optimistic-ethical interpretation of the world. Life-view is prior to world-view. He, then, who turns his attention away from the world into himself, into his inner experience, and meditates deeply upon the reality he finds there, will emerge with a life-view that justifies world- and life-affirmation as well as ethics.

The solution is, not to get rid of dualism from the world, but to realize that it can no longer do us any harm. This is possible, if we leave behind us all the artifices and unveracities of thought and bow to the fact that, as we cannot harmonize our life-view and our world-view, we must make up our minds to put the former above the latter. The volition which is given in our will-to-live reaches beyond our knowledge of the world. What is decisive for our life-view is not our knowledge of the world but the certainty of the volition which is given in our will-to-live. The eternal spirit meets us in nature as mysterious creative power. In our will-to-live we experience it within us as volition which is both world- and life-affirming and ethical.

Our relation to the world as it is given in the positive certainty of our will-to-live, when this seeks to comprehend itself in thought: that is our world-view. World-view is a product of life-view, not vice versa.<sup>38</sup>

We are, then, so to speak, immunized against skepticism.

And what is it that man finds when he meditates on himself? What is the first, the most immediate and continually given fact of his own consciousness? It is certainly not Descartes' "dogma," "I think, therefore I exist," for the concept of thought involves the prior consciousness of existence. Besides, that rationalistic approach to the problem leads nowhere but to abstract theories, as the history of thought has shown. Rather, the most immediate and simple fact of

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<sup>38</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. xvi.



consciousness is this: "I will to live."<sup>39</sup> It is as will-to-live that man concerns himself during every moment that he spends in meditating on himself.

And when man reflects upon the world, that is asks knowledge to tell him what it can about life, what knowledge provides is little, yet immense. It teaches only this: "that in and behind all phenomena there is will-to-live."<sup>40</sup>

Progress in science consists only in increasingly accurate description of the phenomena in which life in its innumerable forms appears and passes, letting us discover life where we did not previously expect it, and putting us in a position to turn to our own use in this or that way what we have learnt of the course of the will-to-live in nature. But what life is, no science can tell us. . . . Hence the difference between learned and unlearned is entirely relative. The unlearned man who, at the sight of a tree in flower, is over-powered by the mystery of the will-to-live which is stirring all round him, knows more than the scientist who studies under the microscope or in physical and chemical activity a thousand forms of the will-to-live, but, with all his knowledge of the life-course of these manifestations of the will-to-live, is unmoved by the mystery that everything which exists is will-to-live, while he is puffed up with vanity at being able to describe exactly a fragment of the course of life.<sup>41</sup>

Hence, for Schweitzer, "I am life which wills to live, in the midst of life which wills to live."<sup>42</sup> This most immediate fact of man's consciousness is obtained when man would reach clear notions about himself and his relation to the world.

<sup>39</sup> Clark, Henry, "The Ethics of Reverence for Life," The Philosophy of Albert Schweitzer, London: Methuen and Co., 1962, p. 182.

<sup>40</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 241.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 242.



What should be one's attitude toward this other life? It can only be a piece with one's attitude to his own life.

All true knowledge passes on into experience. The nature of the manifestations I do not know, but I form a conception of it in analogy to the will-to-live which is within myself. Thus my knowledge of the world becomes experience of the world. The knowledge which is becoming experience does not allow me to remain in face of the world a man who merely knows, but forces upon me an inward relation to the world, and fills me with reverence for the mysterious will-to-live which is in all things. By making me think and wonder, it leads me ever upwards to the heights of reverence for life. There it lets my hand go. It cannot accompany me further. My will-to-live must now find its way about the world by itself.<sup>43</sup>

As one clings to life, then, because of his "reverence for life," although the thinking will-to-live realizes it is free to choose whether or not to live, and longs "for wider life and for the mysterious exaltation of the will-to-live which we call pleasure, with dread of annihilation and of the mysterious depreciation of the will-to-live which we call pain"<sup>44</sup> so, too, in the other life around one. Hence, in a world which "is a ghastly drama of will-to-live divided against itself,"<sup>45</sup> the thinking being "feels a compulsion to give to every will-to-live the same "reverence for life that he gives to his own. He experiences that other life in his own."<sup>46</sup> And since evil is what annihilates, hampers or hinders life, whether regarded physically or spiritually, while

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>46</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 126.



goodness is the saving or helping of life, the enabling of whatever life one can to attain its highest development, Schweitzer believes the basic principle of the moral which is a necessity of thought to be this: "It is good to maintain and to encourage life; it is bad to destroy life or to obstruct it."<sup>47</sup>

As an additional argument for the ethic of "reverence for life," Schweitzer has in Indian Thought and its Development and in an essay entitled "The Ethics of Reverence for Life" stressed the solidarity apparent in and between various forms of life, pointing to the fact that in animals traces at least of ethical instinct and ethical conduct are discernible. In Indian Thought and its Development, he writes:

The ethical determination of our will to live goes back to the physical fact that our life has sprung from other life and allows other life to proceed from it. So we cannot rest in a complete state of existence for ourselves alone, and we refuse to rest in it because of our close relationship with the life from which we derive and with that derived from ourselves. Thus the most rudimentary ethics are found not only in mankind but in the more highly developed animals are a giving effect in action to the solidarity with other life which is directly related to us.<sup>48</sup>

This additional argument is explored more fully in an essay entitled "The Problem of Ethics in the Evolution of Human Thought" and in his last published work, The Teaching of Reverence for Life. With respect to human life, in the latter, he writes:

To the primitive, this solidarity has narrow limits. It is confined, first to his blood relations, and then to the members of his tribe, who represent to him the family enlarged. I speak from

<sup>47</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 242.

<sup>48</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Indian Thought and its Development, p. 261.



experience. I have such primitives in my hospital. If I ask an ambulatory patient to undertake some small service for a patient who must stay in bed, he will do it only if the bedridden patient belongs to his tribe. If that is not the case, he will answer me with wide-eyed innocence: "This man is not brother of me." Neither rewards nor threats will induce him to perform a service for such a stranger.

But as soon as man begins to reflect upon himself and his relationship to others, he becomes aware that men as such are his equals and his neighbor. In the course of gradual evolution he sees the circle of his responsibilities widening until he includes in it all human beings with whom he has any dealings. . . .

Throughout history, the insight that we have a wider duty toward human beings as such has never attained to the full dominance to which it is entitled. Down to our own times, it has been undermined by differences of race, religion and nationality, and we have not yet overcome the barriers of estrangement this created between people.<sup>49</sup>

And, with respect to animal creation, they too, while not as apparent as in human instances, are compelled by ethics. In "The Ethics of Reverence for Life," Schweitzer cites three examples from personal experience of instances brought to his attention, of which the first is as follows:

The first example was told me by someone from Scotland. It happened in a park where a flock of wild geese had settled to rest on a pond. One of the flock had been captured by a gardener, who had clipped its wings before releasing it. When the geese started to resume their flight, this one tried frantically, but vainly, to lift itself into the air. The others, observing his struggles, flew about in obvious effort to encourage him; but it was no use. Whereupon, the entire flock settled back on the pond and waited, even though the urge to go on was strong within them. For several days they waited until the damaged feathers had grown sufficiently to permit the goose to fly. Meanwhile, the unethical gardener,

<sup>49</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Teaching of Reverence for Life, pp. 9-11.



having been converted by the ethical geese, gladly watched them as they finally rose together, and all resumed their long flight.<sup>50</sup>

### Special Characteristics of "Reverence for Life"

The philosophy of "reverence for life" has certain specific characteristics. One specific characteristic is its rationality. Schweitzer affirms that "reverence for life" is a "necessity of thought,"<sup>51</sup> and that whoever earnestly "explores the depth of thought must arrive at this point."<sup>52</sup> Therefore, "to be truly rational is to become ethical."<sup>53</sup> Confronted, however, with the question why "reverence for life" was not long ago recognized to be the basis of rational thought, if it is such a reasonable and necessary attitude, Schweitzer answers that "thought fears such an ethic"<sup>54</sup> because its wants are for systematized rules and regulations, hence such an ethic is discredited by calling it irrational. But Schweitzer is more interested in affirming the truth of "reverence for life" than in discussing why more thinkers have not seen the truth. He writes:

This is the absolute and reasonable ethic. Whether such-and-such a man arrives at this principle, I may not know. But I

<sup>50</sup> Clark, Henry, "The Ethics of Reverence for Life," The Philosophy of Albert Schweitzer, London: Methuen and Co., 1964, p. 193.

<sup>51</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 126.

<sup>52</sup> Clark, Henry, op. cit., p. 186.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 186.



know that it is given inherently in the will-to-live. Whatever is reasonable is good.<sup>55</sup>

Again:

Beginning to think about life and the world leads a man directly and almost irresistibly to Reverence for Life. Such thinking leads to no other conclusion which could point in any other direction.<sup>56</sup>

And again:

If rational thought thinks itself out to a conclusion, it arrives at something non-rational which, nevertheless, is a necessity of thought. This is the paradox which dominates our apiritual life. If we try to get on without this non-rational element, there result views of the world and of life which have neither vitality nor value.

All valuable conviction is non-rational and has an emotional character, because it cannot be derived from knowledge of the world but arises out of the thinking experience of our will-to-live, in which we stride out beyond all knowledge of the world. . . .

What a remarkable circle! Rational thought which thinks itself out arrives at something non-rational and subjective which is a necessity of thought, namely the ethical affirmation of world and life. On the other hand, what for the purpose of moulding the conditions of existence for individual men and mankind as a whole is rational, that is to say, what is objectively practical in this regard, can only be brought about by individuals perseveringly putting into action the above-mentioned non-rational and subjective. The non-rational principle underlying our activity, a principle which is provided for us by rational thought, is the sole rational and practical principle underlying all the happenings which are to be produced through human action. Thus the rational and non-rational, the objective and the subjective, proceed each from the other, and return each into the other again. Only when the play of this mutual interchange is in full activity do normal conditions of existence arise for men and mankind. Let it be disturbed, and the abnormal develops.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>56</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 179.

<sup>57</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, pp. xix-xxii.



A second specific characteristic of "reverence for life" is its absoluteness. Schweitzer employs the term "absolute" as opposite not to "relative" but to the "practicable."<sup>58</sup> By absolute ethics, he means that ethics must always be striving for the idea, never resting content with what is merely possible. And "reverence for life," Schweitzer admits, is an ideal that cannot be perfectly realized.

I too am subject to division of my will-to-live against itself. In a thousand ways my existence stands in conflict with that of others. The necessity to destroy and to injur life is imposed upon me. If I walk along an unfrequented path, my foot brings destruction and pain upon the tiny creatures which populate it. In order to preserve my own existence, I must defend myself against the existence which injures it. I become a persecutor of the little mouse which inhabits my house, a murderer of the insect which wants to have its nest there, a mass-murderer of bacteria which may endanger my life. I get my food by destroying plants and animals. My happiness is built upon injury done to my fellow-men.<sup>59</sup>

And "reverence for life" contains no casuistry of specific rules and regulations for every forseeable situation. It simply confronts us with the fact that we are responsible for the lives about us.

In ethical conflicts man can arrive only at subjective decisions. No one can decide for him at what point, on each occasion, lies the extreme limit of possibility for his persistence in the preservation and furtherance of life. He alone has to judge this issue, by letting himself be guided by a feeling of the highest possible responsibility toward other life.

We must never let ourselves become blunted. We are living

<sup>58</sup> Clark, Henry, op. cit., p. 186.

<sup>59</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 250.



in truth, when we experience these conflicts more profoundly. The good conscience is an invention of the devil.<sup>60</sup>

"Reverence for life" does "throw upon us a responsibility so unlimited as to be terrifying."<sup>61</sup>

The ethics of reverence for life make no distinctions between higher and lower, more precious and less precious lives. It has good reason for this omission. For what we are doing, when we establish hard and fast gradations in value between living organisms, but judging them in relation to ourselves, by whether they seem to stand closer to us or farther from us. This is a wholly subjective standard. How can we know what importance other living organisms have in themselves and in terms of the universe.

In making such distinctions, we are apt to decide there are forms of life which are worthless and may be stamped out without its mattering at all. This category may include anything from insects to primitive peoples, depending on circumstances.<sup>62</sup>

The truly ethical man, then, regards all life as sacred. When obliged to discriminate, as he often is, between higher and lower forms of life, sacrificing the one to the other, such discriminations are made only from case to case and under the pressure of necessity. Such discriminations are, however, purely subjective and arbitrary, and do not imply that the lower form is worthless or unworthy of respect as life, or that we can destroy it without compunction. The idea of there being worthless life, or any life which we destroy and damage without compunction or regret is to be blamed more fundamentally than any other for the inhumanity of the present age.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>62</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Teaching of Reverence for Life, p. 47.



With respect to our relation to other human beings, again, "reverence for life" offer no rules with regard to conflicts which arise between inward compulsion to altruism and necessary self-maintenance: "I have to decide in accordance with the responsibility of which I am conscious, how much of my life, my possessions, my rights, my happiness, my time, and my rest I must devote to others, and how much I may keep for myself."<sup>63</sup> The ethics of "reverence for life" is an "inexorable creditor"<sup>64</sup> requiring "that all of us somehow and in something shall act as men toward other men."<sup>65</sup>

But to everyone, in whatever state of life he finds himself, the ethics of reverence for life do this: they force him without cessation to be concerned at heart with all the human destinies and all the other life-destinies which are going through their life-course around him, and to give himself, as man, to the man who needs a fellow-man. They will not allow the scholar to live only for his learning, even if his learning makes him very useful, nor the artist to live only for his art, even if by means of it he gives something to many. They do not allow the very busy man to think that with his professional activities he has fulfilled every demand upon him. They demand from all that they devote a portion of their life to their fellows. In what way and to what extent this is prescribed for him, the individual must gather from the thoughts which arise in him, and from the destinies among which his life moves. One man's sacrifice is outwardly insignificant. He can accomplish it while continuing to live a normal life. Another is called to some conspicuous act of self-sacrifice, and must therefore put aside regard for his own progress. But let neither judge the other. The destinies of men have to be decided in a thousand ways in order that the good may become actual. What he has to bring as an offering is the secret of each individual. But one with another we have all to recognize that our existence reaches its

<sup>63</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 254.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>65</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Teaching of Reverence for Life, p. 39.



true value only when we experience in ourselves something of the truth of the saying: "He that loseth his life shall find it."<sup>66</sup>

Even then, however, situations arise when personal morality conflicts with a man's "supra-personal responsibility"<sup>67</sup> and the more extensive his activities, the more he finds himself in a position of having to sacrifice part of his humanity to his supra-personal responsibility.

The craftsman who manages a business, however small, and the musician who conducts public performance, cannot be men in the way they would like to be. The one has to dismiss a worker who is incapable or given to drink, in spite of any sympathy he has for him and his family; the other cannot let a singer whose voice is the worse for wear appear any longer, although he knows what distress he thus causes.<sup>68</sup>

In such situations a man must choose between the ethical and the necessary or expedient, and if under the pressure of the supra-personal responsibility he chooses to yield to the latter, he incurs guilt through failure in "reverence for life."

Only the reverence felt by my will-to-live for every other will-to-live is ethical. Whenever I in any way sacrifice or injure life, I am not within the sphere of the ethical, but I become guilty, whether it be egoistically guilty for the sake of maintaining my own existence of welfare, or unegoistically guilty for the sake of maintaining a greater number of other existences or their welfare.<sup>69</sup>

By acting on his supra-personal responsibility, then, a man abandons a part of his humanity for "Ethics go only so far as does humanity,

<sup>66</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 257.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 260.



humanity meaning consideration for the existence and the happiness of individual human beings. Where humanity ends, pseudo-ethics begin.<sup>70</sup> Hence, in a situation which involves supra-personal responsibility, it is necessary that we struggle to preserve as much humanity as it is possible and when in doubt venture to make a mistake on the side of humanity rather than on that of the object in view.

Thus we serve society without abandoning ourselves to it. We do not allow it to be our guardian in the matter of ethics. That would be as if the solo violinist allowed his bowing to be regulated by that of a double-bass player. Never for a moment do we lay aside our mistrust of the ideals established by society, and of the convictions which are kept by it in circulation. We always know that society is full of folly and will deceive us in the matter of humanity. It is an unreliable horse, and blind into the bargain. Woe to the driver, if he falls asleep!<sup>71</sup>

A third specific character of "reverence for life" is its universality. For Schweitzer, a man is truly ethical only when he recognizes and obeys the obligation to give and, when possible, to all life and shrinks from wantonly injuring anything that lives. He does not ask in how far this life or that is valuable, nor whether it is capable of feeling and to what degree. For him, all life is sacred.

He tears no leaf from a tree, plucks no flower, and takes care to crush no insect. If in summer he is working by lamplight, he prefers to keep the window shut and breathe a stuffy atmosphere rather than see one insect after another fall with singed wings upon his table.

If he walks on the road after a shower and sees an earth-worm which has strayed on to it, he bethinks himself that it must

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 262.



get dried up in the sun, if it does not return soon enough to the ground into which it can burrow, so he lifts it from the deadly stone surface, and puts it on the grass. If he comes across an insect which has fallen into a puddle, he stops for a moment in order to hold out a leaf or a stalk on which it can save itself.<sup>72</sup>

Ethics, then, are responsibility without limit toward all that lives:

"Ethics are boundless in their domain and limitless in their demands."<sup>73</sup>

And Schweitzer refuses to draw a sharp line between the living and non-living, even stating that ice crystals fall within the province of wills-to-live and must be reverenced.

And when the idea of "reverence for life" has once taken possession of a man's thought, it never lets go. Sympathy, love and all that is valuable in enthusiasm are comprised in it. In the mind it has seized, it works with unceasing vitality, involving it in the unrest of a ceaseless sense of unlimited responsibility. Questions of success or significance do not come into consideration at all. What is significant for the world is the fact that in the ethically-developed man there will have appeared a will-to-live filled with "reverence for life" and a self-devotion to all other life.

The ignorance in which the world is wrapped has no existence for me; I have been saved from the world. I am thrown, indeed, by reverence for life into an unrest such as the world does not know, but I obtain from it a blessedness which the world cannot give. If in the tenderheartedness produced by being different from the world another person and I help each other in understanding and pardoning, when otherwise will would torment will, the division of the will-to-live is at an end.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>73</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Indian Thought and its Development, p. 260.

<sup>74</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 246.



In other words, "In the universe, the will to live is in conflict with itself. In us, it seeks to be at peace with itself. . . . The mind commands us to be different from the universe."<sup>75</sup>

A fourth specific characteristic of "reverence for life" is that it is complete. For Schweitzer, a "complete code of ethics" consists of "the ethics of passive self-perfected, combined with ethics of active self-perfected."<sup>76</sup> Now if phenomena is viewed as "real Being,"<sup>77</sup> through devotion to them, the ethics of self-perfected and the ethics of altruism are united and one has succeeded in relating himself to infinite Being. Schweitzer's system of ethics is ethical mysticism: "Whenever my life devotes itself in any way to life, my finite will-to-live experiences union with the infinite will in which all life is one."<sup>78</sup> Mystical union with the infinite is attained through serving and co-operating with the "Creative Will" of the universe, not through attempting to understand it. He writes:

Only by serving every kind of life do I enter the service of that Creative Will whence all life emanates. I do not understand it; but I do know (and it is sufficient to live by) that by serving life, I serve the Creative Will. It is through community of life, not community of thought, that I abide in harmony with that Will. This is the mystical significance of ethics.<sup>79</sup>

And, again:

<sup>75</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Teaching of Reverence for Life, p. 27.

<sup>76</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 227.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 238.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>79</sup> Clark, Henry, op. cit., p. 189.



The view of Reverence for Life is ethical mysticism. It allows union with the Infinite to be realized by ethical action. This ethical mysticism originates in logical thinking. If our will-to-live begins to think about itself and the world, we come to experience the life of the world, so far as it comes within our reach, in our own life, and to devote our will-to-live to the infinite will-to-live through the deeds we do. Rational thinking, if it goes deep, ends of necessity in the nonrational of mysticism. It has, of course, to deal with life and the world, both of which are non-rational entities.

In the world the infinite will-to-live reveals itself to us as will-to-create, and this is full of dark and painful riddles for us; in ourselves it is revealed as will-to-love, which will through us remove the dilemma of the will-to-live.<sup>80</sup>

Since Schweitzer rejects "Essence of Being," an "Absolute," or a "Spirit of the Universe," as expressions denoting nothing actual but mere abstractions, for "the only reality is the Being which manifests itself in phenomena,"<sup>81</sup> what, then, does Schweitzer mean by God? In 1923, Oscar Kraus, a professor of philosophy at the University of Prague, who was acquainted with Schweitzer personally and who had an earnest desire to understand his friend's philosophized thought, wrote to Schweitzer complaining about the indefiniteness of the concept of God in his ethical mysticism. The letter which Kraus received in January, 1924, is one of Schweitzer's most illuminating pronouncements on this problem. Schweitzer writes:

Hitherto it has been my principle never to express in my philosophy more than I have experienced as a result of absolutely logical reflection. That is why I never speak in philosophy of 'God' but only of the 'universal will-to-live' which I realise in my consciousness in a two fold way: firstly, as a creative will

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<sup>80</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 182.

<sup>81</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 237.



outside myself and secondly, as an ethical will within me. Certainly the probable influence of which you speak (that Schweitzer is a pantheist) does suggest itself, but it seems to me nevertheless doubtful whether it is the business of philosophy to draw this conclusion, whether the Weltanschauung--its power, for instance--would gain anything by it. That is why I prefer to content myself with a description of the experience of reflection, leaving pantheism and theism as an unsolved conflict in my soul. For that is the actuality to which I am always being forced to return.

But if I speak the traditional language of religion, I use the word 'God' in its historical definiteness and indefiniteness, just as I speak in ethics of 'Love' in place of 'Reverence for Life.' For I am anxious to impart to others my inwardly experienced thought in all its original vividness and in its relationship to traditional religion. In so doing I make no concessions to the philosophy of nature or to religion. For in both cases the result is exactly the same: renunciation of full knowledge of the universe and adoption of my inwardly experienced will-to-live as the prime factor. My lectures on religion contain much criticism of religious thought. But the views expressed in them are so self-evident that they cannot shock anyone's feelings, for the ultimate issue, that on which everything else depends, 'the being laid hold of by the ethical will' stands in the center of all my arguments.

I do not seem able to get beyond this renunciation of knowledge of the universe nor beyond the conflict between pantheism and theism. And I mean it in the philosophical as well as in the traditional religious sense. Ah! dear friend, how much rather would I follow together with you the paths which lead to Brentano. But I must leave a question-mark in their place... I have been compelled to do so since I was fifteen. It is my fate and my destiny to reflect and to live, to ponder on the question how much of ethics and religion can be comprised in a Weltanschauung which dares to be inconclusive. But on one point at least we are both in absolute agreement, namely, as to the character of the Weltanschauung, or what I call the 'quality of the Weltanschauung.' And this is the main thing.<sup>82</sup>

! Still, however, the more basic ambiguity of the "two-fold guise" in which the universal will-to-live presents itself is not resolved. In the epilogue to his autobiography Out of My Life and

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<sup>82</sup>Kraus, Oskar, op. cit., p. 42.



Thought, Schweitzer writes:

Anyone who has recognized that the idea of Love is the spiritual beam of light which reaches us from the Infinite, ceases to demand from religion that it shall offer him complete knowledge of the suprasensible. He ponders, indeed, on the great questions: what the meaning is of the evil in the world; how in God, the great First Cause, the will-to-create and the will-to-love are one, in what relation the spiritual and the material life stand to one another. . . .

Every form of living Christianity is pantheistic in that it is bound to envisage everything that exists as having its being in the great First Cause of all being. But at the same time all ethical piety is higher than any pantheistic mysticism, in that it does not find the God of Love in Nature, but knows about Him only from the fact that He announces Himself in us as Will-to-Love. . . . Theism does not stand in opposition to pantheism, but emerges from it as ethically determined out of what is natural and undetermined.<sup>83</sup>

Such an unresolved conflict in one's thought, Schweitzer, then, does admit. However, he is not afraid to face this embarrassment. Indeed, he considers a frank avowal of the hopelessness of escape from this paradox to be the beginning of wisdom. In any case, as he stated in his letter to Kraus, the "quality of the world-view" is the "main thing," and "being laid hold of by the ethical divine will" is a quality which he believes can be achieved without knowledge. This mode of thought Schweitzer applies to the problem of God, distinguishing in a passage already cited from Christianity and Religions of the World the relatively inadequate and the relatively adequate or determinative sources of knowledge about God and feeling toward God.

And man's mode of relatedness to the "two fold" dynamic force which operates in the world to create infinite manifestations of

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<sup>83</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 184.



will-to-live and in the heart of man to create reverence for these infinite manifestations is a "two-fold" "becoming one of the finite will with the Infinite." It is "two-fold" because the finite will experiences both a passive quiescence in the Infinite and a "being-taken-possession-of by the will of love, which... strives in us to become act."<sup>84</sup> Such relatedness is attainable by the finite will which is capable of experiencing the mystical union as both quiescence and activity, both indispensable in ethical man's relatedness to the "two-fold" dynamic force. And since the fundamental datum of our experience of ourselves being will-to-live, it is in the realm of the will we find mystic relatedness to it, that is by having become conscious of other wills-to-live become desirous of solidarity with it by devoting ourselves to the individual manifestations of will-to-live which need our devotion. Being one with the infinite Will of God implies both solidarity with universal will-to-live in its individual manifestations and union with God as Will-to-Love, which in us desires to become one with other wills-to-live.

For in the world- and life-affirmation and in ethics I carry out the will of the universal will-to-live which reveals itself in me. I live my life in God, in the mysterious divine personality which I do not know as such in the world, but the only experience as mysterious Will within myself.<sup>85</sup>

But how is it that people have hitherto come to such a meaningless result as to enter into spiritual relationship with an unreal product of its intellect? According to Schweitzer, this happens

<sup>84</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 239.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. xviii.



by falling for two temptations, one general and one special. When thought is compelled to express itself in words, it accepts as its own the abstractions and symbols that are coupled with the actual language. This partnership, however, is only for the purpose of allowing us to present the matter in an abbreviated form, without having to propound it with all the details with which it was equipped. With time, however, thought came to operate with these abstractions and symbols as if they represented something that really existed. This is the general temptation. The special temptation lies, in this case, in the fact that man's surrender to God is expressed through the use of abstractions and symbols and in attractively simple matter. This surrender is assumed to consist of a positive relation to Being as such, or to be more definite, the spiritual side of it. Intellectually, this is very attractive.

With views such as these, what can Schweitzer mean by prayer and its significance? While Schweitzer does not address himself to this question in any of his works, the question is of considerable importance in any understanding of his thought, particularly in view of the following:

I shall never forget the first evening in the new hospital. From every fireside and from every mosquito net they call me: 'This is a good hut, doctor, a good hut!'

For the first time since I came to Africa my patients are housed as human beings should be. How I have suffered during these years and from having to pen them together in stifling, dark rooms! Full of gratitude I look up to God who has allowed me to experience such a joy. With deep emotion, too, I thank the friends in Europe, in reliance upon whose help I could venture to move the



hospital, and replace the bamboo huts with corrugated iron wards.<sup>86</sup>

And again:

I am filled with gratitude to God who has given me this health, and what benefits I have received from people, from these unknown friends, who by their gifts have made it possible, that my hospital can be maintained during the war! This gives me renewed strength every day. And what a privilege to be able to help those who suffer. Thus sustained, I cherish the hope to keep going here as long as it will be necessary.<sup>87</sup>

And Erica Anderson in her book, Albert Schweitzer's Gift of Friendship quotes Schweitzer as having, before the evening meal, spoken the following prayer: "Thank the Lord for He is gentle and His kindness is everlasting," and then, following the meal, to have passed out hymn books for group singing for which he played the piano, followed by a reading and interpretation of a short passage from the Scriptures.<sup>88</sup>

Schweitzer's only comment on prayer and its significance is contained in a letter dated May 8, 1957, to Gabriel Langfeldt. Langfeldt paraphrases Schweitzer as having written "that prayer means surrender to the spirit that is revealed in us in order that we can thereby achieve peace and the strength to bear all the burdens that are laid upon us."<sup>89</sup> Hence, it would seem that while he is unable to

<sup>86</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, On the Edge of the Primeval Forest, p. 62.

<sup>87</sup> Roback, A. A. (ed.). Albert Schweitzer Jubilee Book, Cambridge: Sci-Art Publishers, 1945, p. 115.

<sup>88</sup> Anderson, Erica, Albert Schweitzer's Gift of Friendship, New York: Harper and Row, 1964, p. 21.

<sup>89</sup> Langfeldt, Gabriel, Albert Schweitzer : A Study of His Philosophy of Life, London: Allen and Unwin, 1960, p. 56.



abstract the deity and address himself to it in prayer, his surrender to the mysterious primal force is none the less, to him, a source of constant renewal and a help in bearing the burdens of the day.

#### "Reverence for Life" Seen as a Civilization-Saving Ethic

Once the theory of "reverence for life" crystallized in his mind, Schweitzer presented it as the ethic that can save civilization. "Reverence for life" is the ethic that civilization needs.

The reference for life which has grown up in the will-to-live which has become reflective, contains world- and life-affirmation and ethics side by side and interpenetrating each other. It therefore cannot but continually think out and will all the ideals of ethical civilization, and strive to bring them into agreement with reality.<sup>90</sup>

As a result of his discovery, Schweitzer saw the dawn of "a new Renaissance."<sup>91</sup>

I would be a humble pioneer of this Renaissance, and throw the belief in a new humanity, like a torch, into our dark age. I make bold to do this because I believe I have given to the disposition to humanity, which hitherto has ranked only as a noble feeling, a firm foundation in a philosophy of life which is a product of elementary thinking and can be made intelligible to everyone. Moreover, it has gained thereby a power of attracting and convincing which it has not had hitherto; and is capable now of trying conclusions in energetic and consistent fashion with reality, and of proving its full value within it.<sup>92</sup>

What is it that "reverence for life" does to save civilization? Civilization cannot be furthered unless one understands its main

<sup>90</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 265.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. xxiii.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. xxiii.



constituent. First of all, then, the true character of life as will-to-live is recognized. With this beginning, the proper groundwork is laid. Ethical energies are not misdirected for one knows with what it deals and what and how are the ends to be sought.

It also affirms and unites all life, returning to it the worth that it has largely lost. In doing this, "It therefore cannot but continually think out and will all the ideals of ethical civilization, and strive to bring them into agreement with reality."<sup>93</sup> And such affirmation is necessary to see the worth of life, to sustain it in its activity, and in that way to serve a proper civilization-making function. Because reverence affirms the world and life, it has a supporting quality that all pessimism or negation has lacked. But it is not a ruthless, and therefore destructive kind of affirmation of each life putting itself against all others.

Implied by this affirmation is a new and necessary sense of values. Life is the supreme value which must be preserved at all cost, and the others having standing only as they further it. The perfection of man becomes the goal. This is by definition a central factor in civilization. "Reverence for life" promotes the four ideals of civilization: "the ideal of the individual; the ideal of social and political organization; the ideal of spiritual and religious social organization; the ideal of humanity as a whole."<sup>94</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 267.



But not only is the worth of individual man recognized and his spirit changed, in due time a similar effect will transpire among the masses. They, too, will become spiritualized. And this is necessary for a healthy civilization. No life, then, may be sustained, in principle, at the cost of another. Since there is no point at which "reverence for life" can call to a halt, the individual man becomes concerned about the world. The disposition for growth and change is there. It should, and will cause men to devote their lives for the common good.

And further, "reverence for life" renders another service, in that based on elemental life-drives, it provides a sufficiently powerful ethical motivation. Both individually, and in society, men find the will to do what ought to be done with a singleness of mind to its one absolute. And because of his interest in all life, man's interest in the total world is maintained at sufficient strength.

Hence, in the present age in which the revolutionary progress accompanying our revolutionary progress in knowledge frees man from nature and makes nature serviceable to him, while at the same time, by cutting himself loose from her, permits him to slip into conditions of life whose unnatural character brings with it manifold dangers to himself and thus to civilization, "reverence for life" is our only hope in the struggle for a civilized mankind in the age of machines. It is a development that can and must be brought about if we are to prevent all progress in discovery and invention evolving at last to a fatal result.

Only through thoughtful reverence for life shall we become capable of this achievement. If that reverence begins anywhere to work in our minds, then the miracle is possible. The power of the



elementary and living spirituality that is to be found in it is beyond calculation.<sup>95</sup>

What is the role of the State and Church in this development? According to Schweitzer, they can and must become effective aids to the ethical spiritualizing of men, and in their organization can and must incline themselves to humanity. In order, however, that this may be brought about, institutions must be regarded not merely as natural historical entities but also as necessary entities, that is, they, too, must become capable of development. And this presupposes the present abnormal relation in which the individual has surrendered more and more of his spiritual independence to them and received his way of thinking from them must be reversed and that the individual must increasingly assert himself as a formative influence upon them.

That which is decisive for the commencement of a development of State and Church which has civilization for its object, is that the mass of men belong to these two entities in the attitude of mind of reverence for life and the ideals which grow from it: when that is the case there arises in States and Churches a spirit which works for their transformation into ethical and spiritual values.<sup>96</sup>

The concept of "reverence for life" is able to bring about the transformation of the Church to the ideal of a religious association because it has a religious character, that is, it puts "in the very centre of things the most living and universal element of piety,"<sup>97</sup> which is oneness with the infinite Will which experiences itself in us as the will-to-love. Thus, "there is a possibility that Christianity

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 274.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 277.



and thought may now meet in a new relation to each other which will do more than the present one to promote spiritual life."<sup>98</sup> Too, "it leads the different religious associations out of the narrowness of their historical past, and paves the way for understanding and union between them."<sup>99</sup> Further yet, for the many non-religious people, "the world- and life-view of reverence for life enables these non-religious minds to learn that every philosophy of life which is based on sincere thought necessarily becomes religious. Ethical mysticism reveals to them the necessity to thought of the religion of love, and thus leads them back to paths which they believed they had abandoned for ever."<sup>100</sup>

In the transformation of the modern state, which "finds itself to-day in an unprecedented condition of material and spiritual penury"<sup>101</sup> with its position further endangered "by the fact that it has far overstepped the limits of its natural sphere of operations,"<sup>102</sup> into the truly civilized state, a seemingly impossible task, "reverence for life" offers, yet, some hope. We must first come to have faith in the power of the spirit to work such a transformation. The majority, then, must attain to the reflection of the absolute indefensibility of the continuance of the state in its present conditions and demand from it

<sup>98</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 182.

<sup>99</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 277.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 278.



that it shall become more spiritual and more ethical than any hitherto, for "only with efforts to reach the true ideal do we get progress."<sup>103</sup>

Only by a new attitude of mind ruling within it can the state attain the peace within its borders; only by a new attitude of mind arising between them can different states come to understand each other, and cease to bring destruction upon each other; only by treating the overseas world in a different spirit from that of the past and of to-day, can modern states cease to load themselves in that connection with guilt. . . .

We are therefore freed from any duty of forming a conception of the civilized state which accords with the specifications of nationalism and national civilization, and we are at liberty to turn back to the profound naivete of thinking it to be a state which allows itself to be guided by an ethical spirit of civilization. With confidence in the strength of the civilized attitude of mind which springs from reverence for life we undertake the task of making this civilized state an actuality.

Feeling ourselves responsible to the civilized way of thinking we look beyond peoples and states to humanity as a whole. To anyone who has devoted himself to ethical world- and life-affirmation, the future of men and of mankind is a subject of anxiety and of hope.<sup>104</sup>

#### "Reverence for Life," the Ideal as Experienced by Schweitzer

As a growing boy, Albert Schweitzer dealt increasingly with people and with animals suggestive of his later mature behaviour. We cannot, perhaps, call this practising "reverence for life," insofar as the crystallization of that view did not come to him until his first sojourn in Africa. It does, however, make us aware that in actual conduct there has been no very noticeable change from the earlier period of his life to the later one.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 279.



Schweitzer's manner of living his philosophy is to treat every plant, every animal, and every human with utmost concern, and this is well demonstrated in Schweitzer's own works and in numerous writings about Schweitzer. For purposes of illustration, we select, therefore, instances which serve to demonstrate his application of the principle of "reverence for life."

Schweitzer "reverences" plant life. When clearing the site of his new hospital, he constantly came across oil-palms, which, because of the matted creeper vines which clung to them and stifled their growth, prevented them from flowering or giving fruit, hence he cut the creepers at their root, but not so the oil-palms.

We burden ourselves with some extra work out of compassion for the palm-trees with which the site of our future home is crowded. The simplest plan would be to cut them all down. An oil-palm is valueless, there are so many of them. But we cannot find it in our heart to deliver them over to the axe just when, delivered from creepers, they are beginning a new life. So we devote some of our leisure hours to digging up carefully those which are transplantable and setting them elsewhere, though it is heavy work. Oil-palms can be transplanted when they are 15 years old and quite big. ... How thankful the palms are when the sun can at last shine upon them. 105

Emory Ross in an article "Schweitzer in America" reports the following incident during Schweitzer's visit to America.

At breakfast time on the morning after their arrival the Schweitzers came across the street from their hotel to our house, where they were to eat most of their meals. Mrs. Schweitzer was carrying a huge basket of cut flowers.

"Albert can't bear to see flowers cut, you know," she said, "so I brought these over here."

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<sup>105</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Forest Hospital at Lambarene, New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1931, p. 175.



In the days ahead, cut flowers poured into our house for our distinguished guests. Finally my wife asked the doctor, "What shall I do with all these flowers that are coming for you?"

"Put them in vases with nice cool water," he said. "I don't like to see flowers hurt, but we mustn't hurt the people who sent them either. Put them out where they will see I appreciate them."<sup>106</sup>

This same concern is in evidence with respect to his treatment of the animal creation. Soon after his first arrival in West Africa, when journeying by canoe, he incurred the reproaches of his native paddlers for refusing to shoot the monkeys in the overhanging boughs or the birds that circled over the river. They compared him unfavourably with one of his missionary friends who was a great sportsman. He willingly endured their reproaches, and they gradually accepted his lack of sportsmanship.

Birds which circle above the water I never like shooting; monkeys are perfectly safe from my weapon. One can often bring down or wound three or four in succession and yet never secure their bodies. They get caught among the thick branches or fall into the undergrowth which covers an impenetrable swamp; and if one finds the body, one often finds also a poor little baby monkey, which clings, with lamentations to its dying mother. My chief reason for keeping a gun is to be able to shoot snakes, which swarm on the grass around my house, and the birds of prey which plunder the nests of the weaver bird in the palm trees in front of it.<sup>107</sup>

When setting the piles in position for the foundation of the hospital, Schweitzer writes:

<sup>106</sup>, "Schweitzer in America," Saturday Review, 48, September 25, 1965, p. 25.

<sup>107</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, On the Edge of the Primeval Forest, p. 49.



Before the pile is lowered into the pit I look whether any ants or toads or other creatures have fallen into it, and if so I take them out with my hands so that they may not be maimed by the pile, or crushed to death later by the earth and stones, and I explain why I do this to those who are standing by. Some smile in embarrassment; others pay no attention at all to what they have heard so often. But one day a real savage who was working with me was fetched to work in the plantation at cutting down the undergrowth. A toad being espied in it, his neighbour wanted to kill it with his bush-knife; but the first one seized his arm and unfolded to him and to a listening group the theory that the animals were like ourselves created by God, and that He will some day hold a great palaver with the men who torment or kill them. This savage was the very last on whom I should have expected my deeds and words to make any impression.<sup>108</sup>

Then, in the epilogue to Out of My Life and Thought, Schweitzer writes:

I buy from natives a young fish eagle, which they have caught on a sandbank, in order to rescue it from their cruel hands. But now I have to decide whether I shall let it starve, or kill every day a number of small fishes, in order to keep it alive. I decide on the latter course, but every day I feel it hard that this life must be sacrificed for the other on my responsibility.<sup>109</sup>

George Seaver in his work, Albert Schweitzer: The Man and His Mind offers two further illustrations.

Hurrying afoot with a companion along an English country lane, to catch a train and keep an appointment, his bulky rucksack slung between them on a walking stick, a sudden jerk brought his companion to a standstill whilst Schweitzer stooped to lift a worm from its peril in the roadway and drop it safely in the grass.

One of his colleagues at Lambarene recalls that while working late at night, when a grape-fruit was brought in to him, he would always drop a spoonful of the juice on the floor beside him, and when it was surrounded by a thirsty crowd of little black ants, he would look up with a smile and say, "Look at my ants! Just like cows round a pond!"<sup>110</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, More from the Primeval Forest, p. 152.

<sup>109</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 181.

<sup>110</sup> Seaver, George, Albert Schweitzer: The Man and His Mind, p. 142.



Mrs. C. E. B. Russel, in her book My Monkey Friends tells how the maimed and the young animals and birds are welcomed as warmly and treated as carefully as the human inmates at Lambarene. From her account and accounts of others, one gains the impression that there were times when the establishment resembled a menagerie. Around him, Schweitzer always had numerous pets whom he treated as personal friends, and about one of these pets, a pelican, Schweitzer wrote a short book, The Story of My Pelican. And Erica Anderson in an article "The African Years" offers many more illustrations, including some recent developments in Schweitzer's personal practice of "reverence for life."

He carried his philosophy into the life of his hospital, where animals were accorded a place of safety and lived in peace with each other. A bee that had invaded the dining room would be caught gently--not killed--and released outside. When a column of ants invaded a visitor's room, he asked her to move into another until they had crossed through and gone their way. "Don't be cruel to them," he said. He urged workers to watch as they dug to avoid harming insects, nor would he permit the wood of building posts to be treated with chemicals that would endanger insect life. Instead he counted on the toughness of the timber to be its own protection: "I use wood that is termite-proof. If they still dare to nibble on it, they will have to go to a dentist."

No bird or animal in the hospital village--hen or pig or sheep--was killed for food. Fish and crocodile meat brought by fishermen were occasionally served at table, but Schweitzer himself in recent years had given up eating either meat or fish, even the liver dumplings he used to relish and enjoy. "I can't eat anything that was alive," he said. When a man questioned him on his philosophy and said that God made fish and fowl for people to eat, he answered, "Not at all. Only when a creature can't exist without feeding on other animals may it be fed so. When natives bring pelicans whose wings are clipped and they can't fish for themselves, I feed them fish, but always with a feeling of sadness and built." To visitors who asked what to do with a young antelope they had purchased from a hunter who had killed its mother, he said, "Unsweetened milk, air, sun, shade, and love for the antelope--



but what did you do to the hunter?"<sup>111</sup>

Another illuminating incident is offered by Allan A. Hunter in his article "Schweitzer at Aspen."

In Africa once, Mrs. Schweitzer told me, she complained about the rats. They kept her awake at night. So she set a trap (you can be sure it was calculated to do no violence to any creature). Seeing the catch next morning Mrs. Schweitzer was pleased. She asked a servant to get a boat and take the whole lot far out on the Ogowe River in a sack, and if necessary, tie something heavy to it so that the rats would sink forever from sight.

The servant shortly returned. Mrs. Schweitzer was puzzled. How could he have done the job so quickly? "I was carrying the rats to the river," he explained sheepishly, "but the doctor saw me. He said, 'Give them to me.' I did. Then he let them all out."<sup>112</sup>

The rats came back of course. Later in the day Mrs. Schweitzer stated the issue as clearly as she could. "My husband," she said, trying not to be exasperated, "I ask you: Which do you value more, those rats or my sleep?" The doctor's answer was silence, complete, devastating silence. Yes, Mrs. Schweitzer is a saint. She has to be.<sup>112</sup>

As a result of his views and his practices, made the more persuasive through written articles, Schweitzer has had considerable influence in furthering the movement for the protection of animals. A number of his articles are to be found in magazines devoted to that cause. In 1951, Charles R. Joy even issued a selective Schweitzer anthology under the title, The Animal World of Albert Schweitzer. Joy illustrates by instances taken from Schweitzer's own example his concern for all animal creation, and utilizes Schweitzer's expression re-affirming that in the animal world nothing is insignificant, nor may

<sup>111</sup>, "The African Years," Saturday Review, 48, September 25, 1965, p. 19.

<sup>112</sup>, "Schweitzer at Aspen," The Christian Century, 66, July 27, 1949, p. 891.



be injured unless absolutely necessary.

While it is in his treatment of non-human life that he is so very remarkable, Schweitzer is no less concerned about human existence. It was because of reports of the suffering of the African natives that moved him to offer himself to their service, and it was by his work at Lambarene, his "moral experiment," that his ideal of self-devotion was largely achieved. But his concern about human existence did not end there and hence Schweitzer set to work to offer to the world a moral philosophy by which the diseased civilization of mankind could yet be cured. Much later, Schweitzer spoke out on political issues. In 1954, he delivered the Nobel Peace Prize Address on the topic, "The Problem of Peace in the World of Today." In 1957, he issued his "A Declaration of Conscience" against nuclear weapon tests. In 1958, he delivered three radio broadcasts from Oslo, Norway, on atomic weapons: "The Renunciation of Nuclear Tests," "The Danger of Atomic War," and "Negotiations at the Highest Level." In August 6, 1963, Schweitzer wrote a letter to President J. F. Kennedy encouraging ratification by the United States of the Geneva Test Ban Treaty and Schweitzer's letter may have swayed some of the non-committed senators to throw their support behind his proposal. Then, Schweitzer's last published work, The Teaching of Reverence for Life, contains two chapters devoted to atomic weapons and atomic war.

It is, however, in his treatment in his everyday dealings both with the natives in Africa and the many others, both inside and outside of Africa, who have come in contact with him, that we see his care and concern about his fellow man. Hence, while being wholly kind



to the African natives, he deals with them in terms of a loving paternalism for he regards the native as a "child" and himself as an "elder brother" and consequently insists on the necessity of an interval between himself and them in order that he may serve them well. This is however, held to be no negation of the proper spirit: "the essential thing between the whites and the blacks is that there shall be a real feeling of brotherliness."<sup>113</sup> But in all relations with them, he holds, the best authority to be the moral. Otherwise people would be tempted to exercise direct authority and through it to be harsh and unscrupulous. With such views as these, Schweitzer understood the impossibility for the Negro of breaking completely and immediately all links with his past. Hence, Schweitzer opposed granting the native immediate and full political independence, thus making him an easy prey to members of his own group and of outside interests.

In his dealings with people, it was characteristic of Schweitzer to let his actions be directed to the service of others in Africa as elsewhere. Hence, while a medical student, a time when he was fighting a continual battle with fatigue because of an incredibly full schedule, he played each day to an elderly lady. At another time, he sat as a model for an elderly woman whose disease was incurable but whose interest in painting preserved her desire to continue despite her sufferings. In memory of a poor cripple whom he had treated while in a prisoner-of-war camp, he has thereafter helped heavily-laden people at train stations. In his hospital no patient justifiably requiring medical

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<sup>113</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, On the Edge of the Primeval Forest, p. 130.



attention was refused even should he have stolen the very drugs he was healed with and sold them in the village. It was standard practice that in the hospital even hopeless cases should be treated with sympathy in hope of easing their misery. Both in Africa and during periods of rest in Europe, he received visitors and made every effort, in spite of his demanding schedule, to meet their many requests. He rebuked himself for permitting, without objection, his companions to make fun of the oboe players who, at a concert he gave in Barcelona after the end of World War II, played badly because they had just had their first good meal and as a result were unable to properly control their breathing. During his trip to America, he met, even during his mealtime or rest time, continual requests for his autograph, and at the end of an exhausting day volunteered to escort his guest back to his lodgings lest he be unable to find his way. These few illustrations serve to show Schweitzer's characteristic dealings with people. However, "...Dr. Schweitzer was nobody's fool, except Christ's," writes Allan A. Hunter and records the following incident in support.

One newspaper reporter, at the weary end of a long day, sought too persistently for just one more illustration of the principle of reverence for life. The doctor's ready smile did not fail, but he took the interviewer's arm and said: "Even I am part of the life to be reverenced. Suppose you have a little reverence for me now. I am very tired." The cross-examination suddenly ended.<sup>114</sup>

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114 , "Schweitzer at Aspen," The Christian Century, 66, July 27, 1949, p. 893.



## CHAPTER VI

### ALBERT SCHWEITZER, AN EXISTENTIAL<sup>1</sup> MODEL FOR AN ETHICALLY-ORIENTED SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

Albert Schweitzer in his various works has, with few exceptions, touched upon the schools. His few direct comments about the schools are contained only in the second chapter of his work, The Decay and the Restoration of Civilization. Here he writes:

In all professions, most clearly perhaps in the pursuit of science, we can recognize the spiritual danger with which specialization threatens not only individuals, but the spiritual life of the community. It is already noticeable, too, that education is carried on now by teachers who have not a wide enough outlook to make their scholars understand the interconnection of the individual sciences, and to be able to give them a mental horizon as wide as it should be.

Then, as if specialization and the organization of work, where it is unavoidable, were not already injurious enough to the soul of the modern man, it is pursued and built up where it could be dispensed with. In administration, in education, and in every kind of calling the natural sphere of activity is narrowed as far as possible by rules and superintendence. How much less free in many countries is the elementary school teacher of to-day compared with what he was once! How lifeless and impersonal has his teaching become as a result of these limitations.<sup>2</sup>

And:

In the education and the school books of to-day the duty of humanity is relegated to an obscure corner, as though it were no

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<sup>1</sup>"Existential" is used here in the sense as "living," "actual." The use of "existential" here does not necessarily imply a connection with the existential "school" of philosophy. The student of existential philosophy could no doubt find much of relevance in the life and thought of Albert Schweitzer.

<sup>2</sup>Schweitzer, Albert, The Decay and the Restoration of Civilization, p. 22.



longer true that it is the first thing necessary in the training of personality, and as if it were not a matter of great importance to maintain it as a strong influence in our human race against the influence of outer circumstances. It has not been so always. There was a time when it was a ruling influence not only in schools, but in literature, even down to the book of adventures. Dafoe's hero, Robinson Crusoe, is continually reflecting on the subject of humane conduct, and he feels himself so responsible for loyalty to this duty that when defending himself he is continually thinking how he can sacrifice the smallest number of human lives; he is so faithful, indeed, to this duty of humanity, that the story of his adventures acquires thereby quite a peculiar character. Is there among works of this kind to-day a single one in which we shall find anything like it?<sup>3</sup>

From the foregoing, it is apparent that Schweitzer viewed the schools as the mirror image of the societies they served, the chaos in Western society being reflected in the schools, as well as in other institutions. The school was a part of the decay of Western civilization and contributed to that decay. This is due to the fact that the schools, like the societies they served, had not a commonly accepted world-view. As a result, in schools confused are purposes, methods, as well as the curriculum.

Schweitzer recognized, however, that the solution to the present chaotic conditions in society lie not in the reform of its institutions but in the reform of its individual members achieved by the attainment of a reflective world-view. Having produced such a theory, "new men under the old circumstances,"<sup>4</sup> he believed would then reform its institutions so that they be compatible with and serve their world-view.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 60.



The best planned improvements in the organization of our society (though we are quite right in trying to secure them) cannot help us at all until we become at the same time capable of imparting a new spirit to our age.<sup>5</sup>

In Schweitzer's judgment, the reform of individual members of society, if our civilization is not to collapse totally, must proceed in spite of its institutions. Schweitzer, however, placed his every confidence in truth, in man's capacity to arrive at truth, and in the power generated by truth as being stronger than the force of circumstances. His sole purpose with respect to the problem facing the Western World, and hence all civilization, was to bring man to the recognition of the problem as caused by his lack of a world-view and so stimulate him to devote his energies to finding a basis for his will-to-activity and progress, which impels his actions, in a reflective world-view and in the preface of his work, The Decay and the Restoration of Civilization; we are told precisely this.

I do not know how many, or how few, will allow themselves to be persuaded to travel with me on the road indicated above. What I desire above all things--and this is the crux of the whole affair--is that we should all recognize fully that our present entire lack of any theory of the universe and of life, in order that thus we may arrive at a mental disposition which shall make us really and truly civilized men.<sup>6</sup>

Serious personal reflection about "final and elemental things," even should it fail to produce a complete and satisfactory world-view, was, in Schweitzer's opinion, valuable in itself.

Even if thought, once more awakened should only attain to an

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. xii.



incomplete and unsatisfying theory of the universe, yet this, as the truth to which we have ourselves worked through, would be of more value than a complete lack of any theory at all, or, alternatively, than any sort of authoritative theory to which, neglecting the demands of true thought, we cling on account of its supposed intrinsic value without having any real and thorough belief in it. . . .

Mere reflection about the meaning of life has already value in itself. If such reflection should again come into being amongst us, the ideals, born of vanity and of passion, which now flourish in rank profusion like evil weeds among the convictions of the generality of people, would infallibly wither away and die. How much would already be accomplished towards the improvement of our present circumstances if only we would all give up three minutes every evening to gazing up into the infinite world of the starry heavens and meditating on it, or if in taking part in a funeral procession we would reflect on the enigma of life and death, instead of engaging in thoughtless conversation as we follow behind the coffin! The ideals, born of folly and passion, of those who make public opinion and direct public events, would have no more power over men if they once began to reflect about infinity and the finite, existence and dissolution, and thus learnt to distinguish between true and false standards, between those which possess real value and those which do not. . . . How much more it is true that the injustice and violence and untruth, which are now bringing so much disaster on the human race, would lose their power if only a single trace of reflection about the meaning of the world and of life should appear amongst us!<sup>7</sup>

In Schweitzer's case, as we know, such reflection when pursued to its ultimate conclusion led him, he believed, to a complete and satisfying world-view, a world-view attained not by following the paths of previous thought by deducing the meaning of life from its interpretation of the universe, but finding the meaning of life rooted in the will-to-live as this exists in ourselves.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 102.



The Case for an Ethically-Oriented System of Education as it Follows  
from Schweitzer's Views

Schweitzer, as we have already seen, conceived the nature of civilization as being two-fold: as realizing itself in the supremacy of reason over the forces of nature and over the dispositions of men. Material achievements, however, do not equal civilization, "but become civilization only so far as the mental habit of civilized peoples is capable of allowing them to aim at the perfecting of the individual and the community."<sup>8</sup> Tested in this light, it is "the sum total of all progress made by men and the individual man in every sphere of action and from every point of view. . . ."<sup>9</sup> A real will to civilization, then, is one to universal progress, with the highest value being attached to the ethical. It is the "progress of all progress."<sup>10</sup>

Because Schweitzer maintains that the spiritual and moral perfecting of individuals is the ultimate goal of civilization, it should follow that Schweitzer would assign this objective as the primary task of the schools. Education would be the process by which individuals become civilized. If that be so, the goals of education and of civilization would then be inseparably one. We might say that Schweitzer's views represent a new singular goal for all education around which all others would revolve.

<sup>8</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 8.



The Case for Using Schweitzer as an Existential Model in an Ethically-Orientated System of Education

Schweitzer's accomplishments and moral grandeur do evoke our admiration. By many of those who have known him or have come to know him through his writings, he has been regarded as a truly outstanding world figure. Winston Churchill has called him a "Genius of Humanity."<sup>11</sup> President L. B. Johnson spoke of him as a "truly universal figure"<sup>12</sup> and Chancellor Ludwig Erhard referred to him as "a true world citizen."<sup>13</sup> Of him, Albert Einstein has said, "Nowhere have I found such an ethical union of goodness and passion for beauty as in Albert Schweitzer."<sup>14</sup> Pierhal, a Schweitzer biographer, implies Schweitzer's sainthood and he is not alone in this. Hagedorn, another Schweitzer biographer, and others have compared him with Jesus. Clement C. Chesterman in a poem "An Elephant in Ebony" which appeared in his book, To Dr. Albert Schweitzer, refers to him as "Superman."

Whether we accept his philosophy or not--this is not the point. The moral grandeur of the man commends itself to us. Alone, this is sufficient reason for utilizing Schweitzer as an ethical model in an ethically-oriented school system.

<sup>11</sup> Clark, Henry, op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, New York Times, September 6, 1965, p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> Clark, Henry, op. cit., p. 1.



Models played a significant part in Schweitzer's own life and without them it is doubtful whether Schweitzer would have arrived at his world-view of "reverence for life." Undoubtedly the model that was most influential in his life and thought was that of Jesus. However, one cannot discount all the other influences upon his character: his parents, his grandfather, his uncle Albert, Pastor Schillinger, Dr. Wehmann, Widor, Bach, Kant, Goethe, Paul the Apostle, to mention but a few. To these, and all others who had a decided influence on his life, Schweitzer in Memoirs of Childhood and Youth, in most homely utterance pays them tribute.

One other thing stirs me when I look back at my youthful days, viz. the fact that so many people gave me something or were something to me without knowing it. Such people, with whom I have, perhaps, never exchanged a word, yes, and others about whom I have merely heard things by report, have had a decisive influence upon me; they entered into my life and became powers within me. Much that I should otherwise have felt so clearly or done so effectively was felt or done as it was, because I stand, as it were, under the sway of these people. . . . Much that has become our own in gentleness, modesty, kindness, willingness to forgive, in veracity, loyalty, resignation under suffering, we owe to people in whom we have seen or experienced these virtues at work, sometimes in a great matter, sometimes in a small. A thought which had become act sprang into us like a spark, and lighted a new flame within us.<sup>15</sup>

Schweitzer, however, would not condone his life and thought being used as "the" ethical model in an ethically-oriented school system. Clark reports from a personal conversation with a former teacher at the Albert Schweitzer College in Churwalden, Switzerland, that permission for them to use Schweitzer's name was granted by Schweitzer only on the condition that neither he nor his thought would

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<sup>15</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Memoirs of Childhood and Youth, p. 89.



be shown any partiality in the courses taught there.<sup>16</sup> In a personal conversation with Dr. Schweitzer at Lambarene, Dr. Phillips, who sought to use Schweitzer's name in connection with Chairs and Distinguished Professorships in American universities, quotes Schweitzer in his work Safari of Discovery as having said, "My system of ethics must not be organized or institutionalized. It should be discovered by individuals. . . . I do not relish the publicity associated with your idea nor do I feel in any way worthy of the honor your proposition implies. . . . I do not think it fair for you to ask other ethical scholars to live in the shadows of my ethical contribution. Surely worthy scholars will wish to be independent emissaries of their own thought."<sup>17</sup> From these latter replies, it would seem that Schweitzer would disavow any hero worship.

In this, Schweitzer's behaviour is compatible with his teaching, for a central core of his ethics is reverence for individual freedom. Schweitzer himself has asserted that "Every being who calls himself a man is meant to develop into a real personality with a reflective theory of the universe which he has created for himself."<sup>18</sup> In Schweitzer's opinion, knowledge of moral awareness grows out of self-knowledge, that is thinking which impulse stirs in everyone, and

<sup>16</sup> Clark, Henry, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Phillips, Herbert, Safari of Discovery: the Universe of Albert Schweitzer, New York: Twayne Publishers, 1958, pp. 175-178.

<sup>18</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Decay and the Restoration of Civilization, p. 93.



elemental thinking widens and deepens it. But self-knowledge must, in Schweitzer's thinking, be illuminated by the ethical heritage of man, hence he has asserted that in ethical scholarship "we must pass through the whole experience of mankind in its search for the ethical."<sup>19</sup> Ethics, Schweitzer, has so often said, comes from thought itself. It is then apparent that Schweitzer would believe that a major prerequisite for ethical inquiry and ethical growth is the ability to think in breadth and depth. Freedom of ethical inquiry would be the free man's approach to his spiritual development and ethical learning. If however, Schweitzer, were to serve as "the" ethical model in our school system, such indoctrination would displace true ethical education, the result being the arresting of ethical growth and the wisdom of self-perfection, the result being the atrophying of scholarship. It is for this reason that Schweitzer would reject and has rejected his life and thought being accorded a partiality in the schools. At the same time, however, Schweitzer would also reject the dismissal of his life and thought by the schools as being irresponsible.

Bearing this in mind, in the schools whose primary function is to train ethically-mature citizens, the life and thought of Albert Schweitzer could serve as "an" ethical model. It could serve as an ethical model at the three levels of education: at the elementary school level, at the secondary school level, and at the post-secondary school level, that is at the colleges and the universities.

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<sup>19</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 24.



Albert Schweitzer as an Existential Model at the  
Elementary School Level

In what respect might the life and thought of Albert Schweitzer be utilized as an existential model at the elementary school level? Schweitzer's own life provides us with an answer. As a growing child, Albert Schweitzer dealt with people and with animals in a manner suggestive of his world-view of "reverence for life." This early ethical behaviour was in a large measure the result of certain childhood experiences. We would argue here that if these experiences of Schweitzer's were sufficient, in part, to initiate in him at a remarkably early age the development of a keen moral awareness, it should be possible through utilizing these experiences in the elementary classroom to initiate and deepen in students a keen moral awareness.

We do not intend here to make mention of all those childhood experiences which to a large degree led Schweitzer to behave in an ethical manner. We have previously made mention of a number of them in chapter three, and they are readily available to students and teachers alike in his short and charming book Memoirs of Childhood and Youth.

To initiate and deepen the development of a moral awareness in students, teachers would present to their students selected childhood experiences from Memoirs of Childhood and Youth. Students should listen to or read about Schweitzer's experiences, and as each is presented, they should be encouraged to reflect on them. This could be handled by skillful questioning: "Why do you think Albert Schweitzer acted as he did?" "What do you think of such behaviour?" "What



would you have done under similar circumstances?" Since Schweitzer developed a sense of identity and solidarity with the victims of his mindless cruelty by projecting his own feelings on others, teachers should in their discussions encourage children to put themselves in the position of the victim and to respond to such questions as: "How would you feel...?" "What would you do... if any of a variety of disasters, accidents or cruelties were to be visited on you, your friends, or family members?" To this end, a number of recognized teaching methods could be wisely employed, ranging from classroom discussions, written expression, dramatization, etcetera. If the child is led to project his own feelings on others, he should grow in developing a sense of identity and solidarity with the victims of cruelty and in imagining what it feels like to be ill-treated.

As the various childhood experiences of Albert Schweitzer are presented, teachers and children should be encouraged to share their own similar experiences. In regard to utilizing student experiences, teachers should be aware of Schweitzer's own confessed reticence in informing the public of the more intimate details of his development and be reminded of the fact that Schweitzer's attitude stems from his belief that we have no right to intrude upon the inmost feelings and thoughts of one's fellow beings.

After all, is there not much more mystery in the relations of man to man than we generally recognize? None of us can truly assert that he really knows someone else, even if he has lived with him for years. Of that which constitutes our inner life we can impart even to those most intimate with us only fragments; the whole of it we cannot give, nor would they be able to comprehend it. We wander through life together in a semi-darkness in which none of us can distinguish exactly the features of his neighbour; only from time to time, through some experience that we have of our companion,



or through some remark that he passes he stands for a moment close to us, as though illumined by a flash of lightning. Then we see him as he really is. After that we again walk on together in the darkness, perhaps for a long time, and try in vain to make out our fellow-traveller's features.

To this fact, that we are each a secret to the other, we have to reconcile ourselves. To know one another cannot mean to know everything about each other; it means to feel mutual affection and confidence, and to believe in one another. A man must not try to force his way into the personality of another. To analyse others --unless it be to help back to a sound mind someone who is in spiritual or intellectual confusion--is a rude commencement, for there is a modesty of the soul which we must recognise, just as we do that of the body. The soul, too, has its clothing of which we must not deprive it, and no one has a right to say to another: "Because we belong to each other as we do, I have a right to know all your thoughts." Not even a mother may treat her child in that way. All demands of that sort are foolish and unwholesome. In this matter giving is the only valuable process; it is only giving that stimulates. Impart as much as you can of your spiritual being to those who are on the road with you, and accept as something precious what comes back to you from them. . . .

I think, therefore, that no one should compel himself to show to others more of his inner life than he feels it natural to show. We can do no more than let others judge for themselves what we inwardly and really are, and do the same ourselves with them. The one essential thing is that we strive to have light in ourselves. Our strivings will be recognized by others, and when people have light in themselves, it will shine out from them. Then we get to know each other as we walk together in the darkness, without needing to pass our hands over each other's faces, or to intrude into each other's hearts.<sup>20</sup>

As the various voluntary experiences of teachers and students are shared, these, too, could be discussed. Both teacher and student should be encouraged to discuss the human or compassionate acts of others, as well as the mindless, or seemingly mindless acts of others. In all this, the child is aided in clarifying his beliefs and ideals and recognizing inconsistencies between them and his attitudes and standards of behaviour.

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<sup>20</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Memoirs of Childhood and Youth, p. 944.



To this end, we cannot underestimate the role of the teacher as a model. The teacher has a great deal of prestige in the eyes of the child, particularly during the elementary-school years. His own attitudes serve as a model for the child's own attitudes, whether he may want them to or not. The impact of the moral model, Albert Schweitzer, could be largely destroyed by teachers who are themselves not morally sensitive. Conversely, the effect of our moral model could be greatly enhanced by teachers who are themselves morally sensitive.

Albert Schweitzer as an Existential Model at the Secondary School Level

At the secondary school level, in what respect might the life and thought of Albert Schweitzer serve as an ethical model? Again, Schweitzer's life provides us with an answer. Arising out of an awakened moral sensitivity, which, as we have seen in chapter three was present at a remarkably early age, and which, too, as we have already seen again in chapter two was furthered by his childhood experiences, Schweitzer as he grew from a boy into a man, turned increasingly to the alleviation of suffering, both human and non-human. This development is especially well summarized in Memoirs of Childhood and Youth.

It became steadily clearer to me that I had not the inward right to take as a matter of course my happy youth, my good health, and my power of work. Out of the depths of my feeling of happiness there grew up gradually within me an understanding of the saying of Jesus that we must not treat our lives as being for ourselves alone. Whoever is spared personal pain must feel himself called to help in diminishing the pain of others. We must all carry our share of the misery which lies upon the world. Darkly and confusedly this thought worked in me, so that I breathed freely, and fancied once more that I was to become completely the lord of my own life. But



the little cloud has risen above the horizon. I could, indeed, sometimes look away and lose sight of it, but it was growing nevertheless; slowly but increasingly it grew, and at last it hid the whole sky.<sup>21</sup>

Then, there came at age twenty-one his resolve that after thirty, his life should be devoted to the service of mankind. At age thirty, he began to carry out the resolve that he had made, turning to the study of medicine. When he was thirty-seven, his wife and he set out for Africa. Since then, except for intervals of necessary absence, Schweitzer until his death devoted his life in selfless service as a physician on the Ogowe River in French Equatorial Africa. The stories of his experiences there, chiefly contained in On the Edge of the Primeval Forest, More from the Primeval Forest, My African Notebook and Out of My Life and Thought is a major account in itself. Guided, then, by Schweitzer's life, it would follow that in the education of a moral citizenry, the secondary level of education would direct its students' attention to the service of life as an extension of an awakened and deepened moral sensitivity.

To provide direction in this, we have the testimony of Albert Schweitzer's life of selfless devotion. Schweitzer has written, "Judging by what I have learned about men and women, I am convinced that there is far more in them of idealist will power than ever comes to the surface of the world. . . . To unbind what is bound, to bring the underground waters to the surface; mankind is waiting and longing for

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 81-82.



such as can do that."<sup>22</sup> By using Schweitzer as a model at the secondary level of education in directing students' attention to the service of life, we would argue that "idealist will power" can become "unbound" and on that, in Schweitzer's own words depends "the future of civilization."<sup>23</sup>

It is incumbent on teachers and students that they become acquainted with the life of Albert Schweitzer. Of necessity, this first would require an understanding and appreciation of Schweitzer's early childhood and youth and how experiences in that period of his life "set the stage" for his resolve at age twenty-one to devote himself to serve life. This period of his life is especially well described in Memoirs of Childhood and Youth. Then, in order to fully understand and appreciate the enormity of his decision to study medicine and his later decision to set out for Africa to practice medicine, it is necessary that attention be paid to those intervening years, namely from the time Schweitzer entered the University of Strasbourg until he resolved to become a medical doctor. This period of his life is retold in Out of My Life and Thought. Next, it will be necessary to become familiar with those intervening years from the time Schweitzer resolved to become a medical doctor to his arrival at Lambarene. Again, this period of his life is retold chiefly in Out of My Life and Thought.

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<sup>22</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 76.

<sup>23</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Decay and the Restoration of Civilization, p. xi.



Finally, one must follow Schweitzer's life from his arrival in Africa until his death there. This period of his life is well described in Out of My Life and Thought, The Primeval Forest, More from the Primeval Forest, My African Notebook, as well as numerous other autobiographical and biographical accounts.

As well as having the testimony of Schweitzer's own life in directing student attention to the service of life, we have words of guidance from Schweitzer which can aid students in the selection of a vocation. Schweitzer clearly recognizes two vocational paths: devotion to service and devotion to the earning of a living. Of the former, he has written, and we quote his words at some considerable length because they are significant:

As a man of individual action, I have since that time been approached for my opinion and advice by many people who wanted to make a similar venture, but only in comparatively few cases have I taken on me the responsibility of giving them immediate encouragement. I often had to recognize that the need 'to do something special' was born of a restless spirit. Such persons wanted to dedicate themselves to larger tasks because those that lay nearest did not satisfy them. Often, too, it was evident that they had been brought to their decisions by quite secondary considerations. Only a person who can find a value in every sort of activity and devote himself to each one with full consciousness of duty, has the inward right to take as his object some extraordinary activity instead of that which falls naturally to his lot. Only a person who feels his preference to be a matter of course, not something out of the ordinary, and who has no thought of heroism, but just recognizes a duty undertaken with sober enthusiasm, is capable of becoming a spiritual adventurer such as the world needs. There are no heroes of action: only heroes of renunciation and suffering. Of such there are plenty. But few of them are known and even these not to the crowd, but to the few. . . .

Of those who feel any sort of impulse, and would prove actually fitted, to devote their lives to independent personal activity, the majority are compelled by circumstances to renounce such a course. As a rule this is because they have to provide for one or more dependents, or because they have to stick to their calling in order to earn their own living. Only one who thanks to his own



ability or the devotion of friends is in worldly matters a free man, can venture nowadays to take the path of independent activity. This was not so much the case in earlier times because anyone who gave up remunerative work could still hope to get through life somehow or other, while anyone who thought of doing the same in the difficult economic conditions of today would run the risk of coming to grief not only materially but spiritually as well.

I am compelled, therefore, not only by what I have observed, but by experience also, to admit that worthy and capable persons have had to renounce a course of independent action which would have been of great value to the world, because of circumstances rendered such a course impossible.

Those who are so favored as to be able to embark on a course of free personal activity must accept this good fortune in a spirit of humility. They must often think of those who, though willing and capable, were never in a position to do the same. And as a rule they must temper their own strong determination with humility. They are almost always destined to have to seek and wait till they find a road open for the activity they long for. Happy are those to whom the years of work are allotted in richer measure than those who in the end are able to give themselves really and completely!

These favoured persons must also be modest so as not to fly into a passion at the opposition they encounter; they have to meet it in the temper which says: 'Ah, well, it had to be!' Anyone who proposes to do good must not expect people to roll stones out of his way, but must accept his lot calmly if they even roll a few more upon it. A strength which becomes clearer and stronger through its experience of such obstacles is the only strength that can conquer them. Resistance is only a waste of strength.<sup>24</sup>

From the foregoing, we can see Schweitzer has advanced a certain number of considerations and qualifications which should guide those contemplating a life of service.

Of the second path, that of earning a living, Schweitzer has written, and we again quote his words because they are significant:

The hidden forces of goodness are embodied in those persons who carry on as a secondary pursuit the immediate personal service which they cannot make their lifework. The lot of the many

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<sup>24</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Out of My Life and Thought, p. 74.



is to have as a profession, for the earning of their living and the satisfaction of society's claim on them, a more or less soulless labor in which they can give out little or nothing of their human qualities, because in that labor they have to be little better than human machines. Yet no one finds himself in the position of having no possible opportunity of giving himself to others as a human being. The problem produced by the fact of labor being today so thoroughly organized, specialized, and mechanized depends only in part for its solution on society's not merely removing the conditions thus produced, but doing its very best to guard the rights of human personality. What is even more important is that sufferers shall not simply bow to their fate, but shall try with all their energy to assert their human personality amid their unfavourable conditions by spiritual activity. Anyone can rescue his human life, in spite of his professional life, who seizes every opportunity of being a man by means of personal action, however unpretending, for the good of fellow men who need the help of a fellow man. Such a man enlists in the service of the spiritual and good. No fate can prevent a man from giving to others this direct human service side by side with his lifework. If so much of such service remains unrealized, it is because the opportunities are missed.<sup>25</sup>

For the guidance of those who are contemplating the second path, the earning of a living, Schweitzer has advanced a solution to the dehumanizing process to which they will become prey. The solution is to enlist in immediate personal service.

We do not feel it educationally sound, nor in the spirit of Albert Schweitzer, to simply become familiar with Schweitzer's life in order that student attention be directed to the service of life. We feel as a consequence of an acquaintance with Schweitzer's life that the school encourage and promote individual and/or group service activities. These activities should not be foisted upon students but should arise from individual or group awareness of life's miseries. In this, it may, or it may not be necessary for teachers to bring to their students' attention the nature of life's miseries. However, the decision to devote

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 75.



oneself in service must be left entirely to the student. In the discharge of the service project or projects, the wise teacher will, of course, offer guidance and direction. As a consequence of this practical application of service, we would argue that the effect of our moral model, Albert Schweitzer, on the lives of the students will be greatly enhanced.

Albert Schweitzer as an Existential Model at the Post-Secondary School Level

In the education for a moral citizenry, the life and thought of Albert Schweitzer can serve as an ethical model at the post-secondary level of education, namely in the colleges and in the universities. To ascertain in what respect this might be so, we turn once more to the life of Albert Schweitzer for an answer. As a result of a deepened moral awareness and sensitivity which led him to devote his life to the service of life, there grew in Schweitzer a philosophic position, a theory of the universe to undergird his practical ethic of "reverence for life." The growth of this position has been traced in chapter three. His philosophic position, summarized here in chapter four and five, is chiefly contained in his monumental works The Decay and the Restoration of Civilization and Civilization and Ethics. These are briefly summarized in Out of My Life and Thought and in The Teachings of Reverence for Life. Guided, then, by the ethical model, Albert Schweitzer, it would follow that at the post-secondary level of education, attention would be given to philosophic inquiry so that the students can arrive at an ethical position of their own.



In this, the post-secondary level of education can be guided by Schweitzer. The model offers guidance in two ways. First, by identifying as the real cause of the decay of civilization the ethical infancy of the "civilized" world and his presentation of a solution for the chaos in which civilization finds itself, Schweitzer, because he would reject uncritical exploration of his philosophy of "reverence for life" or slavish adherence to his philosophy of "reverence for life" and insist that "every being who calls himself a man is meant to develop into a real personality with a reflective theory of the universe which he has created for himself,"<sup>26</sup> challenges every true scholar and every true educator to find a unifying theory of the universe. In ethical scholarship, it is certainly helpful to know that for which we must strive. Second, through his own method of arriving at a unifying theory of the universe, Schweitzer has provided direction to co-adventurers. Again, it is certainly helpful to have the guidance of one who has himself sought that which he challenges every human being to discover for himself.

There is in all of this educational ramifications for the post-secondary school. In our hour of crisis, scholarship must be directed to ethics, a cruelly-slighted foster child in education. Our colleges and universities turn out great technical experts and specialists by the thousands and condemn them to a life of ethical illiteracy by oversight and neglect of ethics. In Schweitzer's opinion, this derilection can only hasten the degeneration of our civilization.

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<sup>26</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, The Decay and the Restoration of Civilization, p. 93.



Affected, too, are the purposes, content and teaching methods of a course or courses in ethics. In a course or courses in ethics, each student would search for ethics of his very own. While Schweitzer would protest against the neglect of the moral wisdom of mankind and insist that "we must pass through the whole experience of mankind in the search for the ethical"<sup>27</sup> the purpose in all this would not be the learning of massive details of contending value systems for the sake of acceptance or regurgitation but the wrestling constantly and openly with ethical ideals. Ability to think in breadth and depth must be a cardinal prerequisite for ethical inquiry. The wise teacher would teach ethics with genuine candor in the atmosphere of absolute freedom. As an ethical leader, his function would be to aid his students through the use of their own freedom and reason in their personal search for a single moral principle and a community of ethical ideals firmly planted on resolute reason.

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<sup>27</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Civilization and Ethics, p. 24.



## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

Albert Schweitzer is both a stimulating mind and a great heart. In these critical times in which we live, it would be folly to ignore the life and thought of Albert Schweitzer. Whether or not "reverence for life" in the given form and setting is an adequate ethical philosophy as a civilization-building ethics must be left to those who would undertake a critical study. Even if, however, his moral ideal be rejected this should not blind one to aspects of usefulness, nor to suggestions that grow out of them. For example, his injection into ethics of aspects of mysticism and the moral will are among the most basic of his contributions and will need to be given consideration in any approach to the field. Then, too, there may be fruitful prospects in remaining near enough to whatever voice speaks from life itself to do justice to that realm. And we could continue further in drawing out contributions which Schweitzer has made to the field of ethics. Whether or not, then, "reverence for life" be accepted or rejected, Schweitzer's life and thought cannot serve other than to enrich the life of his fellow men.

It is certainly with this in mind that we suggest Schweitzer serve as an ethical model in the education of youth. Spiritual development and ethical learning in the young cannot be left to the caprice of casual and arbitrary contingencies. We would fill the present dangerous spiritual void by utilizing Schweitzer's life and thought as a model in



the elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels of education. Our hope in this is that this will aid in the training of ethically-mature citizens. If Schweitzer is right in his assessment of civilization, our only hope lies in transforming individual members and of society. It is of some interest that Charles A. Lindbergh in his article "Is Civilization Progress?", written in 1964, would concur.

Is civilization progress? The challenge, I think, is clear; and, as clearly the final answer will be given not by our amassment of knowledge, or by the discoveries of our science, or by the speed of our aircraft, but by the effect our civilized activities as a whole have upon the quality of our planet's life--the life of plants and animals as well as that of men.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Is Civilization Progress?", Reader's Digest, August, 1964, p. 29.



## APPENDIX



## A CLASSROOM EXPERIMENT USING THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF ALBERT SCHWEITZER

The author has had occasion to utilize the life and thought of Albert Schweitzer in an elementary classroom.

In a grade three classroom, the following childhood experience from Schweitzer's Memoirs of Childhood and Youth was presented:

There was another incident of my earliest childhood when I remember as the first occasion on which I consciously, and on account of my conduct, felt ashamed of myself. I was still in petticoats, and was sitting on a stool in the yard while my father was busy about the beehives. Suddenly a pretty little creature settled on my hand, and I watched it with delight as it crawled about. Then all at once I began to shriek. The pretty little creature was a bee, which had a good right to be angry when the pastor was robbing him of the honey-filled combs in his hive, and to sting the robber's little son in revenge. My cries brought the whole household round me, and everyone pitied me. The servant-girl took me in her arms and tried to comfort me with kisses, while my mother reproached my father for beginning to work at the hives without first putting me in a place of safety. My misfortune having made me so interesting an object, I went on crying with much satisfaction, till I suddenly noticed that, although the tears were still pouring down, the pain had disappeared. My conscience told me to stop, but in order to be interesting a bit longer I went on with my lamentations, so getting a lot more comforting than I really needed. However, this made me feel such a little rogue that I was miserable over it all the rest of the day. How often in after life, when assailed by temptation has this experience warned me against exaggerating, or making too much of, whatever has happened to me!<sup>1</sup>

Following the presentation of the experience, the author questioned the students to see if they comprehended the reading. The

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<sup>1</sup> Schweitzer, Albert, Memoirs of Childhood and Youth, p. 4.



students were asked the following questions: What was the approximate age of the child? Who was the child's father? What was the child's father doing? What was the child's first reaction to his encounter with the bee? Why did it change? What happened when the child began to cry? After the pain disappeared, why did the child continue crying? What did the child's conscience tell him? How did the child feel the rest of the day? What lesson did the child learn from this experience?

After the author felt the students had comprehended the reading, the students were asked a number of questions based upon the passage and these were discussed at some length. The students were asked the following questions: Did the young boy's father have a right to take the bee's honey? How do you think the bee felt when it saw its honey being taken? Do you think the bee stung the young boy because its honey was being taken? Do you think the bee was right in doing this? Do you think the young boy should have cried after being stung by the bee? Do you think the boy should have stopped crying when his conscience told him to stop? In the discussion following some of the questions, the students recalled many of their own personal experiences related to the question being asked and these too were discussed at some length.

Following the discussion, the author divided the students into groups of four. One group was asked to re-enact the experience exactly as it was read to them. All other groups were asked to re-enact the experience but rather than reacting like the child in the experience, they were asked to react in a way they felt the child in the experience



should have reacted. After selected groups had performed their dramatization, the author and the students discussed the various reactions of the child in each of the dramatizations. The students all agreed that the boy in the experience had reacted wrongly.

As a consequence of this classroom experiment in initiating and developing a moral awareness in students using the childhood experiences of Albert Schweitzer, the author, from his observations, is convinced that using further childhood experiences of Albert Schweitzer in the classroom did and can only further initiate and deepen a moral awareness in children.



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